

the routed the Syrians; *ver.* 18. slew seven thousand men; who belonged to seven hundred chariots, and forty thousand other soldiers, horse and foot, as appears by comparing 1 *Chron.* xix. 18. Their general was killed in the battle, and David came home in triumph, no doubt.

3. The consequence of this victory over the Syrians. 1. David gained several tributaries, *ver.* 19. *The kings*, or petty princes, that had been subject to Hadarezer, when they saw how powerful David was, very wisely *made peace with Israel*, whom they found they could not make war with, and *served them*, who were able to give them protection. Thus the promise made to Abraham, *Gen.* xv. 18. and repeated to Joshua, *chap.* i. 4. that the borders of Israel should extend to the river Euphrates, was performed at length. 2. The Ammonites lost their old allies. *The Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon*, not because they had an unrighteous cause, justifying a crime which was a breach of the law of nations, but because they found it was an unsuccessful cause. It is dangerous helping those that have God against them, for when they fall, their helpers will fall with them.

Jesus Christ, the son of David, sent his ambassadors, his apostles and ministers, after all his servants the prophets, to the Jewish church and nation: but they intreated them shamefully, as Hanun did David's ambassadors, mocked them, abused them, slew them: and this was it that filled the measure of their iniquity, and brought upon them ruin without remedy, *Matt.* xxi. 35, 41. xxii. 7. compare 2 *Chron.* xxxvi. 16. for Christ takes the affronts and injuries done to his ministers, as done to himself, and will avenge them accordingly.

C H A P. XI.

*What David said of the mournful report of Saul's death, may more fitly be applied to the sad story of this chapter, the adultery and murder David was guilty of. Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon. We wish we could draw a veil over it, and that it might never be known, might never be said, that David did such ill things as are here recorded of him; but it cannot, it must not be concealed: the scripture is faithful in relating the faults, even of those whom it most applauds, which is an instance of the sincerity of the penmen, and an evidence that it was not written to serve any party: and even such stories as these were written for our learning, that he that thinks he stands may take heed lest he fall; and that others harms, may be our warnings. Many, no doubt, have been emboldened to sin, and hardened in it, by this story, and to them it is a favour of death unto death; but many have by it been awakened to a holy jealousy over themselves, and constant watchfulness against sin, and to them it is a favour of life unto life. They are very great sins, and greatly aggravated, which here we find David guilty of. 1. He committed adultery with Bath-sheba, the wife of Uriah, *ver.* 1,---5. 2. He contrived to father the spurious brood upon Uriah, *ver.* 6,---13. 3. When that project failed, he plotted the death of Uriah by the sword of the children of Ammon, and effected it, *ver.* 14,---25. 4. He married Bath-sheba, *ver.* 26, 27. Is this David! Is this the man after God's own heart! How is his behaviour changed, worse than it was before Abimelech! How is the gold become dim! Let him that readeth, understand what the best of men are, when God leaves them to themselves.*

1. **A**ND it came to pass, that after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah: but David tarried still at Jerusalem. 2. And it came to pass in an evening-tide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself, and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. 3. And David sent and enquired after the woman: and one said, Is not this Bath-sheba the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? 4. And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her, (for she was purified from her uncleanness) and she returned unto her house. 5. And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child.

Here is, 1. David's glory in pursuing the war against the Ammonites, *ver.* 1. We cannot take that pleasure in viewing this great action, which hitherto we have taken in observing David's achievements, because the beauty of it was stained and sullied by sin: otherwise we might take notice of David's wisdom and bravery in following his blow. Having routed the army of the Ammonites in the field, as soon as ever the season of the year permitted, he sent more forces to waste the country, and further to avenge the quarrel of his ambassadors: Rabbah, their metropolis, gave them a stand, and held out a great while; that city Joab laid close siege to, and it was at the time of that siege that David fell into this sin.

2. David's shame in being himself conquered, and led captive by his own lust. The sin he was guilty of was adultery, against the letter of the seventh commandment, and (in the sense of the patriarchal age) a heinous crime, and an iniquity to be punished by the judges, *Job* xxxi. 11. a sin which takes away the heart, and gets a man a wound and dishonour more than any other, and the reproach of it is not wiped away.

1. Observe the occasions of this sin, which led to it.

(1.) Neglect of his business. When he should have been abroad with his army in the field, fighting the battles of the Lord, he devolved the care upon others, and he himself tarried still at Jerusalem, *ver.* 1. To the war with the Syrians David went in person, *chap.* x. 17. had he been now at his post, in the head of his forces, he had been out of the way of this temptation. When we are out of the way of our duty, we are in temptation.

(2.) Love of ease, and the indulgence of a slothful temper. He came off his bed at evening-tide, *ver.* 2. there he had dozed away the afternoon in idleness, which he should have spent in some exercise, for his own improvement, or the good of others. He used to pray, not only morning and evening, but at noon, in the day of his trouble; it is to be feared he had this noon omitted it. Idleness gives great advantage to the tempter. Standing waters gather filth. The bed of sloth oft proves the bed of lust.

(3.) A wandering eye. He saw a woman washing her self, probably, from some ceremonial pollution, according to the law. The sin came in at the eye, as Eve's did. Perhaps, he sought to see her, at least, he did not practise according to his own prayer, Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity: and his son's caution in a like case, Look not thou on the wine, when it is red. Either he had not, like Job, made a covenant with his eyes, or at this time he had forgot it.

2. The steps of the sin. When he saw her, lust immediately conceived, and, 1. He enquired who she was, *ver.* 3. perhaps, intending only, if she were unmarried, to take her to wife, as he had taken several; but if she were a wife, having no design upon her. 2. The corrupt desire growing more violent, though he was told she was a wife, and whose wife she was, yet he sent messengers for her, and then, it may be, intending only to please himself with her company and conversation. But, 3. When she came, he lay with her, she too easily consenting, because he was a great man, and famed for his goodness too; sure (thinks she) that can be no ill thing, which such a man as David is the mover of. See how the way of sin is down hill, when men begin to do evil, they cannot soon stop themselves. The beginning of lust, as of strife, is like the letting forth of water; it is therefore wisdom to leave it off before it be meddled with. The foolish fly fires her wings, and fools away her life at last, by playing about the candle.

3. The aggravations of the sin. 1. He was now in years, fifty at least, some think more, when those lusts, which are more properly youthful, one would think, should not have been violent in him. 2. He had many wives and concubines of his own, this is insisted on *chap.* xii. 8. 3. Uriah, whom he wronged, was one of his own worthies, a person of honour and virtue, one that was now abroad in his service, jeopardizing his life in the high places of the field, for the honour and safety of him and his kingdom, where he himself should have been. 4. Bath-sheba, whom he debauched, was a lady of good reputation, and, till she was drawn by him, and his influence, into this wickedness, no doubt, had preserved her purity: little did she think, that ever she could have done so ill a thing, as to forsake the guide of her youth, and forget the covenant of her God; nor, perhaps, could any one in the world, but David, have prevailed against her. The adulterer not only wrongs and ruins his own soul, but, as much as he can, another's soul too. 5. David was a king, whom God had intrusted with the sword of justice, and the execution of the law upon other criminals, particularly upon adulterers, who were, by the law, to be put to death; for him therefore to be guilty of those crimes himself, was to make himself a pattern, when he should have been a terror, to evil doers. With what face could he rebuke or punish that in others, which he was conscious to himself of being guilty of? See *Rom.* ii. 22.

Much more might be said to aggravate the sin, and I can think but of one excuse for it, which is, that it was done but once, it was far from being his practice; it was by the surprise of a temptation that he was drawn into it. He was none of those, of whom the prophet complains, that they were as fed horses, neighing every one after his neighbour's wife, *Jer.* v. 8. but this once God left him

to himself, as he did Hezekiah, *that he might know what was in his heart*, 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. Had he been told of it before, he would have said, as Hazael, *What? Is thy servant a dog?* But by this instance we are taught, what need we have to pray every day, *Father, in heaven, lead us not into temptation, and to watch, that we enter not into it.*

6. ¶ And David sent to Joab, *saying*, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David. 7. And when Uriah was come unto him, David demanded of him how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered. 8. And David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet. And Uriah departed out of the king's house, and there followed him a mess of meat from the king. 9. But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house, with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house. 10. And when they had told David, *saying*, Uriah went not down unto his house, David said unto Uriah, Camest thou not from thy journey? why then didst thou not go down unto thine house? 11. And Uriah said unto David. The ark, and Israel, and Judah abide in tents, and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing. 12. And David said to Uriah, Tarry here to day also, and to morrow I will let thee depart. So Uriah abode in Jerusalem, that day and the morrow. 13. And when David had called him, he did eat and drink before him, and he made him drunk: and at even he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but went not down to his house.

Uriah, we may suppose, had now been absent from his wife some weeks, making the campaign in the country of the Ammonites, and not intending to return till the end of it: his wife being got with child in his absence, that (as is usual in this case) would bring to light the hidden works of darkness, and when Uriah, at his return, would find how he had been abused, and by whom, it might well be expected, 1. That he would prosecute his wife, according to law, and have her stoned to death; for *jealousy is the rage of a man*, especially a man of honour; and he that is thus injured, *will not spare in the day of vengeance*, Prov. vi. 34. This Bath-sheba was apprehensive of, when she sent to let David know she was with child, intimating, that he was concerned to protect her, which, it is likely, if he had not promised her to do, (so wretchedly abusing his royal power) she would not have consented to him. Hopes of impunity is a great encouragement to iniquity. 2. It might also be expected, that since he could not prosecute David by law for an offence of this nature, he would take his revenge another way, and raise a rebellion against him. There have been instances of kings, that, by provocations of this nature, given to some of their powerful subjects, have lost their crowns.

To prevent this double mischief, David contrives to father the child, which should be born, upon Uriah himself, and therefore sends for him home, to stay a night or two with his wife. Observe,

1. How the plot was laid. Uriah must come home from the army, under pretence of bringing David an account *how the war prospered*, and how they went on with the siege of Rabbah, ver. 7. Thus doth he pretend a more than ordinary concern for his army, when that was, at present, the least thing in his thoughts; if he had not had another turn to serve, an express of much less figure than Uriah might have sufficed to bring him a report of the state of the war. David having had as much conference with Uriah as he thought requisite to cover the design, sent him to his house, and, that he might be the more pleasant there with the wife of his youth, sent a dish of meat after him, for their supper, ver. 8. When that project failed the first night, and Uriah, being weary with his journey, and more desirous of sleep than meat, lay all night in the guard chamber, the next night he made him drunk, ver. 13. or made him merry, tempted him to drink more than was fit, that he might forget his vow, ver. 11. and might be disposed to go home to his own bed, to which, perhaps, if David could have made him dead drunk, he would have ordered him to be carried. It is a very wicked thing, upon any design whatsoever, to make a person drunk, *wo to him that doth so*, Hab. ii. 15, 16. God will put into their hand a cup of trembling, who put into the hands of others the cup of drunkenness. Robbing a man of his reason, is worse than robbing him of his money; and drawing him into sin, worse than drawing him into any trouble whatsoever. Every good man, especially every magistrate, should endeavour to prevent this sin, by admonishing, restraining, and

denying the glass to those whom they see falling into excess; but to further it, is to do the devil's work, and as factor for him.

2. How this plot was defeated by Uriah's firm resolution not to go lie in his own bed: both nights he slept with the life-guard, and went not down to his house, though, it is probable, his wife pressed him to do it as much as David, ver. 9, 12. Now, 1. Some think he suspected what was done, being informed of his wife's attendance at court, and therefore he would not go near her. But if he had had any suspicion of that kind, sure he would have opened the letter that David sent by him to Joab. 2. Whether he suspected any thing or no, providence put this resolution into his heart, and kept him to it, for the discovering of David's sin, and that the baffling of this design to conceal it, might awaken David's conscience to confess it, and repent of it. 3. The reason he gave to David for this strange instance of self-denial and mortification, was very brave, ver. 11. That while the army was encamped in the field, he would not lie at ease in his own house. The ark is in a tent, whether at home, in the tent David had pitched for it, or abroad, with Joab in the camp, is not certain. Joab, and all the mighty men of Israel, lie hard and uneasy, and much exposed to the weather, and to the enemy, and shall I go take my ease and pleasure at my own house? No, he protests he will not do it. Now, 1. This was it self a generous resolution, and shews Uriah to be a man of a publick spirit, bold and hardy, and mortified to the delights of sense. In times of publick difficulty and danger, it doth not become us to repose our selves in security, or roll our selves in pleasure; or, with the king and Haman to sit down to drink, when the city Shushan was perplexed, Esth. iii. ult. We should voluntarily endure hardness, when the church of God is constrained to it. 2. It might have been of use to awaken David's conscience, and make his heart to smite him for what he had done. 1. That he had basely abused so brave a man as Uriah was, a man so heartily concerned for him and his kingdom, and that acted for him and it, with so much vigour. 2. That he was himself so unlike him. The consideration of the publick hardships and hazards kept Uriah from lawful pleasures, yet could not keep David, though more nearly interested, from unlawful ones. Uriah's severity to himself, should have shamed David for his indulgence of himself. The law was, *when the host goes forth against the enemy, then, in a special manner, keep thy self from every wicked thing*, Deut. xxiii. 9. Uriah outdid that law, but David violated it.

14. ¶ And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. 15. And he wrote in the letter, *saying*, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die. 16. And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were. 17. And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab: and there fell some of the people of the servants of David, and Uriah the Hittite died also. 18. ¶ Then Joab sent, and told David all the things concerning the war: 19. And charged the messenger, *saying*, When thou hast made an end of telling the matters of the war unto the king, 20. And if so be that the king's wrath arise, and he say unto thee, Wherefore approached ye so nigh unto the city when ye did fight? knew ye not that they would shoot from the wall? 21. Who smote Abimelech the son of Jerubbeseth? did not a woman cast a piece of a millstone upon him from the wall that he died in Thebez? why went ye nigh the wall? then say thou, Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also. 22. ¶ So the messenger went, and came and shewed David all that Joab had sent him for. 23. And the messenger said unto David, Surely the men prevailed against us, and came out unto us into the field, and we were upon them even unto the entering of the gate. 24. And the shooters shot from off the wall upon thy servants, and some of the king's servants be dead, and thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also. 25. Then David said unto the messenger, Thus shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee: for the sword devoureth one as well as another: make thy battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it; and encourage thou him. 26. ¶ And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. 27. And when the mourning was past, David sent, and fet her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son: but the thing that David had done, displeased the LORD.

When David's project of fathering the child upon Uriah himself failed, so that in process of time, Uriah would certainly know the wrong that had been done him, to prevent the fruits of his revenge, the devil puts it into David's heart to take him off, and then neither he nor Bath-sheba would be in any danger; what prosecution could there be, when there was no prosecutor? And suggesting further, that when he was out of the way, Bath-sheba might if he pleased be his own for ever. Adulteries have oft occasioned murders, and one wickedness must be covered and secured with another. The beginnings of sin are therefore to be dreaded, for who knows where they will end?

It is resolved in David's breast (which one would think could never possibly have harboured so vile a thought) that Uriah must die; that innocent, valiant, gallant man, who was ready to die for his prince's honour, must die by his prince's hand. David has sinned, and Bath-sheba has sinned, and both against him, and therefore he must die, David determines he must. Is this the man whose heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt? *Quanto mutatus ab illo!* Is this he that executed judgment and justice to all his people? How can he now do so unjust a thing? See how fleshly lusts war against the soul, and what devastations they make in that war: how they blind the eyes, harden the heart, sear the conscience, and deprive men of all sense of honour and justice. *Who so committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding, and quite loseth it; he that doth it destroys his own soul,* Prov. vi. 32.

But as the eye of the adulterer, so the hand of the murderer seeketh concealment, *Job xxiv. 14, 15.* Works of darkness hate the light. When David bravely slew Goliath, it was done publicly and he gloried in it, but when he basely slew Uriah, it must be done clandestinely, for he is ashamed of it, and well he may. Who would do a thing, that he dare not own? The devil having, as a poisonous serpent, put it into David's heart to murder Uriah, as a subtle serpent, he puts it into his head how to do it. Not as Absalom slew Amnon, by commanding his servants to assassinate him, or as Ahab slew Naboth by suborning witnesses to accuse him, but by exposing him to the enemy; a way of doing it, which, perhaps, would not seem so odious to conscience and the world, because soldiers expose themselves of course; if Uriah had not been in that dangerous post, another must, he has (as we say) a chance for his life, if he fight stoutly he may, perhaps, come off, and if he die it is in the bed of honour, where a soldier would choose to die; and yet all this will not save it from being a wilful murder, of malice prepense.

1. Orders are sent to Joab to set Uriah in the front of the hottest battle, and then to desert him, and abandon him to the enemy; *ver. 14, 15.* This was David's project to take off Uriah, and it succeeded, as he designed. Many were the aggravations of this murder. (1.) It was deliberate. He took time to consider of it, and though he had time to consider of it, for he wrote a letter about it, and though he had time to have countermanded the order afterwards, before it could be put in execution, yet he did not do it. (2.) He sent the letter by Uriah himself; than which nothing could be more base and barbarous, to make him accessory to his own death. And what a paradox was it, that he could bear such a malice against him, in whom yet he could repose such a confidence, as that he would carry letters, which he must not know the purport of. (3.) Advantage must be taken of Uriah's own courage and zeal for his king and country, which deserved the greatest praise and recompence to betray him the easier to his fate. If he had not been forward to expose himself, perhaps, he was a man of such a figure, that Joab could not have exposed him, and that this noble fire should be designedly turned upon himself, was a most detestable instance of ingratitude. (4.) Many must be involved in the guilt; Joab the general, to whom the blood of his soldiers, especially the worthies, ought to be precious, must do it; he, and all that retire from Uriah, when they ought in conscience to support and second him, become guilty of his death. (5.) Uriah cannot thus die alone, the party he commands is in danger of being cut off with him; and it proved so, some of the people, even the servants of David (so they are called to aggravate David's sin, in being so prodigal of their lives) fell with him, *ver. 17.* Nay, this wilful ill conduct by which Uriah must be betrayed, might be of fatal consequence to the whole army, and have obliged them to raise the siege. (6.) It will be the triumph and joy of the Ammonites, the sworn enemies of God and Israel; it will gratify them exceedingly. David prayed for himself, that he might not fall into the hands of man, not flee before his enemies, *chap. xxiv. 13, 14.* yet he sells his servant Uriah to the Ammonites, and not for any iniquity in his hand.

2. Joab executes these orders: In the next assault that was made upon the city, Uriah has the most dangerous post assigned him, is put in hopes, that if he be repulsed by the besieged, he shall be relieved by Joab, in dependence on which he marches on with resolution, but succours not coming on, the service proved too hot, and he was slain in it, *ver. 16, 17.* It was strange, Joab would do so ill a thing purely upon a letter, without knowing the reason: But, 1. Perhaps, he supposed that Uriah had been guilty of some great crime, to enquire into which David had sent for him, and that, because he would not punish him openly, he took this course

with him to put him to death. 2. Joab had been guilty of blood, and we may suppose it pleased him very well, to see David himself falling into the same guilt, and he was willing enough to serve him in it, that he might continue to be favourable to him. It is common for those who have done ill themselves, to desire to be countenanced therein by others doing ill likewise, especially by the sins of those that are eminent in the profession of religion. Or, perhaps, David knew, that Joab had a pique against Uriah, and would gladly be revenged on him, otherwise Joab, when he saw cause, knew how to dispute the king's orders, as *chap. xxiv. 3.—xix. 5.*

3. He sends an account of it to David. An express is dispatched away presently, with a report of this last disgrace and loss they had sustained, *ver. 18.* And to humour the thing, 1. He supposeth that David would appear to be angry at his ill conduct, would ask why they come so near the wall, *ver. 20.* Did they not know that Abimelech lost his life by doing so, *ver. 21.* We had the story, *Judg. ix. 53.* which book, it is likely, was published as a part of the sacred history in Samuel's time; and (be it noted to their praise and for imitation) even the soldiers were conversant with their bibles, and could readily quote the scripture story, and make use of it for admonition to themselves not to run upon the same attempts, which there they found had been fatal. 2. He slyly orders the messenger to sooth it up with telling him, that Uriah the Hittite was dead also, which gave too broad an intimation to the messenger, and by him to others, that David would be secretly pleased to hear that: for murder will out. And when men do such base ill things, they must expect to be bantered and upbraided with them, even by their inferiours. The messenger delivered his errand well enough, *ver. 22, 23, 24.* He makes the besieged to sally out first upon the besiegers, they came out unto us into the field, represents the besiegers as doing their part with great bravery, we were upon them, even to the entering of the gate, we forced them to retire into the city with precipitation, and so comes off with a slight mention of the slaughter made among them by some shot from the wall, some of the king's servants are dead, and particularly Uriah the Hittite, an officer of note, stood first in the list of the slain.

4. David receives the account with a secret satisfaction, *ver. 25.* Let not Joab be displeased, for David is not, he blames not his conduct, nor thinks they did ill to approach so near the wall, all is well now Uriah is got out of the way. This point being gained, he can make light of the loss; and turn it off easily with an excuse, *the sword devours one as well as another;* it was a chance of war, nothing more ordinary. He orders Joab to make the battle more strong next time, while he by his sin was weakening it, and provoking God to blast the undertaking.

Lastly, He married the widow in a little time. She submitted to the ceremony of mourning for her husband, as little a time as custom would admit, *ver. 26.* and then David took her to his house as his wife, and she bare him a son. Uriah's revenge was prevented by his death, but the birth of the child so soon after the marriage published the crime, sin will have shame; yet that was not the worst of it, *the thing that David had done displeased the Lord;* the whole matter of Uriah, as it is called, *1 Kings xv. 5.* the adultery, falsehood, murder, and this marriage at last, it was all displeasing to the Lord. He had pleased himself, but displeased God. Note, God sees and hates sin in his own people. Nay, the nearer any are to God in profession, the more displeasing to him their sins are, for in them there is more ingratitude, treachery, and reproach than in the sins of others. Let none therefore encourage themselves in sin by the example of David, for they that sin as he did, will fall under the displeasure of God as he did. Let us therefore stand in awe, and sin not; not sin after the similitude of his transgression.

C H A P. XII.

The foregoing chapter gave us the account of David's sin, this of his repentance; though he fell he was not utterly cast down, but by the grace of God recovered himself, and found mercy with God. Here is, 1. His conviction, by a message Nathan brought him from God, which was a parable that obliged him to condemn himself, ver. 1,—6. And the reddition of the parable, in which Nathan charged him with the sin, ver. 7,—9. and pronounceth sentence upon him, ver. 10,—12. 2. His repentance, and remission, with a proviso, ver. 13, 14. 3. The sickness and death of the child, and his behaviour while it was sick, and when it was dead, ver. 15,—23. in both which David gave evidences of his repentance. 4. The birth of Solomon, and God's gracious message concerning him, in which God gave an evidence of his reconciliation to David, ver. 24, 25. 5. The taking of Rabbah, ver. 26,—31. which is mentioned as a further instance, that God did not deal with David according to his sins.

1. And

1. **A**ND the LORD sent Nathan unto David: and he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. 2. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: 3. But the poor man had nothing save one little ewe-lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his own bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. 4. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock, and of his own herd, to dress for the way-faring man that was come unto him, but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. 5. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, *As the LORD liveth*, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die. 6. And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. 7. ¶ And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul: 8. And I gave thee thy masters house, and thy masters wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if *that had been* too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. 9. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. 10. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. 11. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. 12. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. 13. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. 14. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also *that is* born unto thee, shall surely die.

It seems to have been a great while after David had been guilty of adultery with Bath-sheba, before he was brought to repentance for it: For when Nathan was sent to him, the child was born, *ver. 14.* So that it was about nine months that David lay under the guilt of that sin, and, for ought appears, unrepented of. What shall we think of David's state all this while? Can we imagine his heart never smote him for it? Or that he never lamented it in secret before God? I would willingly hope he did, and that Nathan was sent to him immediately upon the birth of the child, when the thing by that means came to be publicly known and talked of, to draw from him an open confession of the sin, to the glory of God, the admonition of others, and that he might receive by Nathan, absolution with certain limitations. But during these nine months, we may well suppose his comforts, and the exercises of his graces suspended, and his communion with God interrupted, during all that time, for certain he penned no Psalms, his harp was out of tune, and his soul like a tree in winter, that has life in the root only; therefore after Nathan had been with him he prays, *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and open thou my lips*, Psalm li. 12, 15. Let us observe,

1. The messenger God sent to him. We were told by the last words of the foregoing chapter, that the thing David had done displeased the Lord, upon which one would think it should have followed, that the Lord sent enemies to invade him, terrors to take hold on him, and the messengers of death to arrest him: No, he sent a prophet to him, Nathan, his faithful friend and confident, to instruct and counsel him, *ver. 1.* David did not send for Nathan, though he had never so much occasion as he had now for his confessor, but God sent Nathan to David. Note, Though God may suffer his people to fall into sin, he will not suffer them to lie still in it. *He went on forwardly in the way of his heart*, and if left to himself would wander endlessly, but (saith God) *I have seen his ways, and will heal him*, Isa. lvii. 17, 18. He sends after us before we seek after him, else we should certainly be lost. Nathan was the prophet, by whom God had sent him notice of his kind intentions towards him, *chap. vii. 4.* and now by the same hand he sends him

this message of wrath; God's word in the mouth of his ministers must be received, whether it speak terror or comfort. Nathan was obedient to the heavenly vision, and went on God's errand to David: He did not say, David has sinned, I will not come near him; no, *count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother*, 2 Thes. iii. 15. He did not say, David is a king, I dare not reprove him, no, if God send him, he *sets his face like a flint*, Isa. i. 7.

2. The message Nathan delivered to him, in order to his conviction.

1. He fetched a compass with a parable, which seemed to David as a complaint made to him by Nathan, against one of his subjects that had wronged his poor neighbour, in order to his righting the injured, and punishing the injurious. Nathan, it is likely, used to come to him upon such errands, which made this the less suspected; it becomes those who have interest in princes, and have free access to them, to intercede for those that are wronged, that they may have right done them.

(1.) Nathan represented to David a notorious injury, which a rich man had done to an honest neighbour of his, that was not able to contend with him. *The rich man had many flocks and herds*, *ver. 2.* the poor man had one only, so unequally is the world divided, and yet infinite wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, makes the dividend, that the rich may learn charity, and the poor contentment: This poor man had but one lamb, a ewe lamb, a little ewe lamb, having not wherewithal to buy or keep more: But it was a caddis lamb (as we call it) *it grew up with his children*, *ver. 3.* he was fond of it, and it was familiar with him at bed and board. The rich man having occasion for a lamb to entertain a friend with, took the poor man's lamb from him, by violence, and made use of that, *ver. 4.* either out of covetousness, because he grudged to make use of his own; or rather out of luxury, because he fancied the lamb that was thus tenderly kept, and eat and drunk like a child, must needs be more delicate food than any of his own; and have a better relish.

(2.) In this he shewed him the evil of the sin he had been guilty of in defiling Bath-sheba. He had many wives and concubines, whom he kept at a distance, as rich men keep their flocks in their fields; had he had but one, and had she been dear to him, as the ewe-lamb was to its owner, had she been dear to him *as the loving hind and the pleasant roe, her breasts would have satisfied him at all times*, and he would have looked no further, *Prov. v. 19.* Marrying is a remedy against fornication, but marrying many is not, for when once the law of unity is transgressed, the indulged lust will hardly stint itself. Uriah, like the poor man, had only one wife, who was to him as his own soul, and always lay in his bosom, for he had no other, he desired no other to lay there. The traveller or wayfaring man was, as bishop Patrick explains it from the Jewish writers, the evil imagination, disposition, or desire, which came into David's heart, which he might have satisfied with some of his own, yet nothing would serve but Uriah's darling. They observe, that this evil disposition is called a traveller, for in the beginning it is only so, but in time it becomes a guest, and in conclusion is master of the house: For he that is here called a traveller in the beginning of the verse, is called a man (*ish* a husband) in the close of it. Yet some observe, that in David's breast lust was but as a wayfaring man that carries only for a night, it did not constantly dwell and rule there.

(3.) By this parable, he drew from David a sentence against himself: For David supposing it to be a case in fact, and not doubting the truth of it, when he had it from Nathan himself, gave judgment immediately against the offender, and confirmed it with an oath, *ver. 5, 6.* 1. That for his injustice in taking away the lamb, he should restore four-fold, according to the law, *Exod. xxii. 1. four sheep for a sheep.* 2. That for his tyranny and cruelty, and the pleasure he took in abusing a poor man, he should be put to death. If a poor man steal from a rich man, to satisfy his soul when he is hungry, he shall make restitution, though it cost him *all the substance of his house*, *Prov. vi. 30, 31.* (and Solomon there compares the sin of adultery with that, *ver. 32.*) But if a rich man steal for stealing sake, not for want but wantonness, purely that he may be imperious and vexatious, he deserves to die for it, for to him restitution is no punishment, or next none. If the sentence be thought too severe, it must be imputed to the present roughness of David's temper, being under guilt, and not having himself as yet received mercy.

2. He closed in with him at length in the application of the parable. In beginning with a parable he shewed his prudence, and great need there is of prudence in giving reproofs; it is well managed if, as here, the offender can be brought, ere he is aware, to convict and condemn himself; but here in his application he shews his faithfulness, and deals as plainly and roundly with king David himself, as if he had been a common person. In plain terms *thou art the man*, who hast done this wrong, and a much greater to thy neighbour, and therefore by thine own sentence thou deservest to die, and shalt be judged out of thy own mouth; did he deserve to die who took his neighbour's lamb, and dost not thou, who hast taken thy neighbour's wife? Though he took the lamb, he did not cause the owner thereof to lose his life, as thou hast done, and therefore much more art thou worthy to die.

Now he speaks immediately from God, and in his name, begins with *this saith the Lord God of Israel*, a name sacred and venerable to David, and which commanded his attention; Nathan now speaks not as a petitioner for a poor man, but as an ambassador from the great God, with whom is no respect of persons.

1. God, by Nathan, minds David of the great things he had done and designed for him; anointing him to be king; and preserving him to the kingdom, *ver. 7.* giving him power over the house and household of his predecessor, and of others that had been his masters; Nabal for one; he had given him the house of Israel, and Judah, the wealth of the kingdom was at his service, and every body was willing to oblige him. And was ready to bestow any thing upon him to make him easy; *I would have given thee such and such things*; *ver. 8.* See how liberal God is in his gifts, we are not straitened in him: Where he has given much, yet he gives more. And God's bounty to us is a great aggravation of our discontent, and desire of forbidden fruit. It is ungrateful to covet what God has prohibited, while we have liberty to pray for what God had promised; and that is enough.

2. He charges him with a high contempt of the divine authority, in the sins he had been guilty of. *Wherefore hast thou* (presuming upon thy royal dignity and power) *despised the commandment of the Lord?* *ver. 9.* This is the spring, and this the malignity of sin that it is making light of the divine law, and the law-maker: as if the obligation of it were weak, the precepts of it trifling, and the threats not at all formidable. Though no man ever wrote more honourably of the law of God than David did, yet in this instance he is justly charged with a contempt of it. His adultery with Bath-sheba, which began the mischief, is not mentioned, perhaps, because he was already convinced of that, but 1. The murder of Uriah is twice mentioned. *Thou hast killed Uriah with the sword*, though not thy sword, yet, which is all one, with thy pen, ordering him to be slain; they that contrive wickedness and command it, are as truly guilty of it as those that execute it. It is repeated with an aggravation, *Thou hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon*, those uncircumcised enemies of God and Israel. 2. The marrying of Bath-sheba is likewise twice mentioned, because he thought there was no harm in that, *ver. 9.* *Thou hast taken his wife to be thy wife*, and again, *ver. 10.* to marry her whom he had defiled, and whose husband he had slain, was an affront upon the ordinance of marriage, making that not only to palliate, but in a manner to consecrate such villainies. In all this he despised the word of the Lord, so it is in the Hebrew, not only his commandment in general, which forbade such things, but the particular word of promise, which God had, by Nathan, sent to him some time before, that he would build him a house; which sacred promise, if he had had a due value and veneration for, he would not thus have polluted his house with lust and blood.

3. He threatens an entail of judgments upon his family for this sin, *ver. 10.* *The sword shall never depart from thy house*; not in thy time, nor afterwards, but, for the most part, thou and thy posterity shall be engaged in war. Or it points at the slaughters that should be among his children, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah, all falling by the sword. God had promised that his mercy should not depart from him and his house, *chap. vii. 15.* yet here threatens that the sword should not depart. Can the mercy and the sword consist with each other? Yes, those may lie under great and long afflictions, who yet shall not be excluded from the grace of the covenant. The reason given is, because *thou hast despised me*. Note, Those who despise the word and law of God, despise God himself, and shall be lightly esteemed.

It is particularly threatned, 1. That his children should be his grief; *I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house*. Sin brings trouble into a family, and one sin is oft made the punishment of another. 2. That his wives should be his shame; that by an unparalleled piece of villainy they should be publickly debauched before all Israel, *ver. 11, 12.* It is not said it should be done by his own son, lest the accomplishment should have been hindered by the predictions being too plain; but it was done by Absalom at the counsel of Ahitophel, *chap. xvi. 21, 22.* *He that defiled his neighbour's wife, should have his own defiled*, for thus that sin used to be punished, as appears by Job's imprecation, *Job xxxi. 10.* *Then let my wife grind unto another*, and that threatning, *Hos. iv. 14.* The sin was secret and industriously concealed, but the punishment should be open and industriously proclaimed, to the shame of David, whose sin in the matter of Uriah, though committed many years before, would then be called to mind, and commonly talked of upon that occasion. As face answers to face in a glass, so doth the punishment oft answer the sin; here is *blood for blood, and uncleanness for uncleanness*. And thus God would shew how much he hates sin, even in his own people, and, wherever he finds it, will not let it go unpunished.

3. David's penitent confession of his sin hereupon. He saith not a word to excuse himself, or extenuate his sin, but freely owns it, *I have sinned against the Lord*, *ver. 13.* It is likely he said more to this purpose, but this is enough to shew that he was truly humbled by what Nathan said, and submitted himself to the conviction. He owns his guilt, *I have sinned*; and aggravates it, *it was against the Lord*; on this string he harps on the Psalm he penned

on this occasion; *Psal. li. 4.* *Against thee, thee only have I sinned.*

4. His pardon declared upon this penitent confession, but with a proviso. When David said I have sinned, and Nathan perceived that he was a true penitent, 1. He did in God's name assure him that his sin was forgiven, *The Lord also has put away thy sin*, out of the sight of his avenging eye, *thou shalt not die*, i. e. not die eternally, nor be for ever put away from God, as thou wouldst have been if he had not put away the sin. The obligation to punishment is hereby cancelled and vacated. *He shall not come into condemnation*. That is the nature of forgiveness. Thy iniquity shall not be thy everlasting ruin. *The sword shall not depart from thy house*, but, (1.) It shall not cut thee off, thou shalt come to thy grave in peace. David deserved to die as an adulterer and murderer, but God would not cut him off as he might justly have done. (2.) Though thou shalt all thy days be chastened of the Lord, yet thou shalt not be condemned with the world. See how ready God is to forgive sin: To this instance, perhaps, David refers, *Psal. xxxii. 5.* *I said I will confess, and thou forgavest.* Let not great sinners despair of finding mercy with God, if they truly repent, for who is a God like unto him pardoning iniquity? 2. Yet he pronounceth a sentence of death upon the child, *ver. 14.* Behold the sovereignty of God, the guilty parent lives, and the guiltless infant dies, but all souls are his, and he may in what way he pleaseth, glorify himself in his creatures. (1.) David had by his sin wronged God in his honour; he had given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. The wicked people of that generation, the infidels, idolaters, and profane, would triumph in David's fall, and speak ill of God and of his law, when they saw one guilty of such foul enormities, that professed such an honour both for him and it. These are your professors! This is he that prays and sings Psalms, and is so very devout, what good can there be in such exercises, if they will not restrain men from adultery and murder? They would say, was not Saul rejected for a less matter? Why then must David live and reign still? Not considering that God sees not as man sees, but searcheth the heart. To this day there are those who reproach God, and are hardened in sin by the examples of David. Now, though it is true, that none have any just reason to speak ill of God, or of his word and ways, for David's sake, and it is their sin that do so; yet he shall be reckoned with that laid the stumbling block in their way, and gave, though not cause, yet colour for the reproach. Note, There is this great evil in the scandalous sins of those that profess religion and relation to God, that they furnish the enemies of God and religion, with matter for reproach and blasphemy, *Rom. ii. 24.* (2.) God will therefore vindicate his honour, by shewing his displeasure against David for this sin, and letting the world see, that though he loves David he hates his sin, and he chuseth to do it by the death of the child. The landlord may distrain on any part of the premises where he pleaseth. Perhaps, the diseases and deaths of infants were not so common in those days as they are now, which might make this as an unusual thing, the more evident token of God's displeasure, according to the word he had often said, that he would visit the sins of the fathers upon the children.

15. ¶ And Nathan departed unto his house: and the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. 16. David therefore besought God for the child, and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. 17. And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them. 18. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died; and the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead? 19. But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead. 20. Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house, and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. 21. Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child while it was alive, but when it was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. 22. And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? 23. But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me. 24. ¶ And David comforted Bath-sheba

his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her : and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon ; and the LORD loved him. 25. And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet ; and he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD.

Nathan having done his errand stayed not at court, but went home, probably, to pray for David, to whom he had been preaching. God, in making use of him as an instrument to bring David to repentance, and as the herald, both of mercy and judgment, put an honour upon the ministry, and magnified his word above all his name. David named one of his sons, by Bath-sheba, Nathan, in honour of this prophet, 1 Chron. iii. 5. and it was that son, of whom Christ, the great prophet, lineally descended, Luke iii. 31. When Nathan retired, David, it is probable, retired likewise, and penned the fifty-first Psalm, in which, though he had been assured that his sin was pardoned, yet he prays earnestly for the pardon of it, and greatly laments it ; for then will true penitents be ashamed of what they have done, when God is pacified towards them, Ezek. xvi. 63.

Here is, 1. The child's illness. *The Lord struck it, and it was very sick*, perhaps, of convulsions, or some other dreadful distemper, ver. 15. The diseases and death of infants, *that decay not farmed after the similitude of Adam's transgression*, especially as they are sometimes sadly circumstanced, are sensible proofs of the original sin in which they are conceived.

2. David's humiliation under this token of God's displeasure, and the intercession he made with God for the life of the child, ver. 16, 17. *He fasted, and lay all night upon the earth*, and would not suffer any of his attendants, either to feed him, or help him up. This was an evidence of the truth of his repentance. For, 1. Hereby it appeared that he was willing to bear the shame of his sin, to have it ever before him, and to be continually upbraided with it : for this child would be a continual memorandum of it, both to himself and others, if he lived, and therefore, he was so far from desiring its death, as most in that case do, that he prayed earnestly for its life. True penitents patiently bear the rebuke of their youth, and their youthful lusts, Jer. xxxi. 19. 2. A very tender compassionate spirit appeared in this, and great humanity, above what is commonly found in men, especially men of war, towards little children, even their own ; and this was another sign of a broken contrite spirit : they that are penitent will be pitiful. 3. He discovered in this a great concern for another world, which is an evidence of repentance : Nathan had told him that certainly the child should die, yet, while it is in the reach of prayer, he earnestly intercedes with God for it, chiefly (as we may suppose) that its soul might be safe and happy in another world, and that his sin might not come against the child, and that it might not fare the worse for that in the future state. 4. He discovered in this a holy dread of God, and of his displeasure. He deprecates the death of the child, chiefly as it was a token of God's anger against him and his house, and was inclined in performance of a threatening, therefore he prayed thus earnestly, that, if it were the will of God, the child might live, because that would be to him a token of God's being reconciled to him. *Lord, shew me out in thy love and kindness*, Psalm vi. 1.

3. The death of the child : it *lied on the fourth day*, ver. 18. when it was seven days old, and therefore not circumcised, which David might, perhaps, interpret as a further token of God's displeasure, that it died before it was brought under the seal of the covenant, yet he did not therefore doubt of its being happy, for the benefits of the covenant do not depend upon the seals. David's servants judging of him by themselves, were afraid to tell him that *the child was dead*, concluding that then he would disquiet himself more of all ; so that he knew not till he asked, ver. 19.

4. David's wonderful calmness and composure of mind, when he understood the child was dead. Observe, 1. What he did. He, (1.) Calmed the expressions of his sorrow, washed and anointed himself, and called for clean linen, that he might decently appear before God in his house. (2.) *He went up to the chamber, and mourned*, like Job, when he heard of the death of his children. He went to acknowledge the hand of God in the affliction, and to humble himself under it, and submit to his holy will in it : to thank God that he himself was spared, and his sin pardoned ; and to pray that God would not proceed in his covenant with him, nor stir up all his wrath. *Is any affliction to him from now?* Weeping must never hinder worshipping. (3.) *Then he went to his own house, and comforted himself*, as one who found benefit by his religion in the day of his affliction, for, having worshipped, he did rest, and his countenance was no more sad. 2. The reason he gave for what he did. His servants thought it very odd that he should comfort himself so for the sickness of the child, and yet note the death of it so easily ; and asked him the reason of it, ver. 21. In answer to which he gives this plain account of his conduct. 1. That while the child was alive, he thought it his duty to improve the divine favour towards him, ver. 22. *Nathan had said, and the child should die*, but for aught he knew, the threatening might be conditional, as that concerning Hezekiah, and that, upon his great

humiliation, and earnest prayer, he that had so often heard the voice of his weeping, might be pleased to reverse the sentence, and spare the child, *Who can tell whether God will yet be gracious to me?* God gives us leave to be earnest with him in prayer, for particular blessings, from a confidence in his power, and general mercy, though we have no particular promise to build upon : we cannot be sure, yet let us pray, *for who can tell, but God will be gracious to us*, in this or that particular ? In this instance of the sickness of our relations and friends, the prayer of faith has prevailed much, while there is life, there is hope, and while there is hope, there is room for prayer.

2. That now the child was dead, he thought it as much his duty to be satisfied in the divine disposal concerning it, ver. 23. *Now, wherefore should I fast?* Two things checked his grief : 1. *I cannot bring him back again*, and, again, *he shall not return to me*. Those that are dead are out of the reach of prayer ; nor can our tears profit them ; we can neither weep nor pray them back to this life : Wherefore then should we fast ? *To what purpose is this weeping?* Yet David fasted and wept for Jonathan, when he was dead, in honour to him. 2. *I shall go to him* ; (1.) To him to the grave. Note, The consideration of our own death should moderate our sorrow at the death of our relations. It is the common lot ; instead of mourning for their death, we should think of our own ; and whatever loss we have of them now, we shall die shortly, and go to them. (2.) To him to heaven, to a state of blessedness, which even the Old Testament saints had some expectation of. Godly parents have great reason to hope concerning their children that die in infancy, that it is well with their souls in the other world ; for *the promise is to us and to our seed*, which shall be performed to those that do not put a bar in their own door, as infants do not. *Favours sunt amplissimi*. God calls them his children, that are born unto him, and if they be his he will save them. This may comfort us when our children are removed from us by death ; they are better provided for, both in work and wealth, than they could be in this world. We shall be with them shortly, to part no more.

5. The birth of Solomon. Though David's marrying Bath-sheba had displeased the Lord, yet he was not therefore commanded to divorce her, so far from that, that God gave him that son by her, on whom the covenant of royalty should be entailed. Bath-sheba, no doubt, was greatly afflicted with the sense of her sin, and the tokens of God's displeasure. But God having restored to David the joys of his salvation, he comforted her, with the same comforts with which he himself was comforted of God, ver. 24. *he comforted Bath-sheba*. And both he and she had reason to be comforted in the tokens of God's reconciliation to them.

1. That by his providence he gave them a son, not as the former, who was given in anger, and taken away in wrath, but a child graciously given, and written among the living in Jerusalem. They called him Solomon, peaceful, because his birth was a token of God's being at peace with them, and because of the prosperity which was entailed upon him, and because he was to be a type of Christ, the prince of peace. God had removed one son from them, but now gave them another, instead of him, like *Seth instead of Abel*, Gen. iv. 25. Thus God often balanceth the grief of his people with comforts, in the same thing wherein he hath afflicted them, setting the one over against the other. David had very patiently submitted to the will of God, in the death of the other child, and now God made up the loss of that, abundantly to his advantage, in the birth of this. The way to have our creature comforts, either continued, or restored, or the loss of them made up some other way, is cheerfully to resign them to God.

2. That, by his grace, he particularly owned and favoured that son ; *The Lord loved him*, ver. 24. and ver. 25. ordered him, by the prophet Nathan, to be called Jedidiah, *Beloved of the Lord* ; though a seed of evil doers, for so David and Bath-sheba were, yet so well ordered was the covenant, and the crown entailed by it, that it took away all attainders, and corruption of blood, signifying, that those who were by nature children of wrath and disobedience, should, by the covenant of grace, not only be reconciled, but made favourites. And, in this name, he typified Jesus Christ, that blessed Jedidiah, the son of God's love, concerning whom, God declared again, and again, *This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased*.

26. ¶ And Joab fought against Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and took the royal city. 27. And Joab sent messengers to David, and said, I have fought against Rabbah, and have taken the city of waters. 28. Now therefore, gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it : lest I take the city, and it be called after my name. 29. And David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it. 30. And he took their king's crown from off his head, (the weight whereof was 2 talent of gold, with the precious stones) and it was *on David's head* : and he brought forth

forth the spoil of the city in great abundance. 31. And he brought forth the people that *were* therein, and put *them* under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon. So David and all the people returned unto Jerusalem.

We have here an account of the conquest of Rabbah, and other cities of the Ammonites. Though this comes in here after the birth of David's child, yet, it is most probable, it was done a good while before, and soon after the death of Uriah, perhaps, during the days of Bath-sheba's mourning for him.

Observe, 1. That God was very gracious, in giving David this great success against his enemies, notwithstanding the sin he had been guilty of, just at that time when he was engaged in this war, and the wicked use he had made of the sword of the children of Ammon, in the murder of Uriah: Justly might he have made that sword, from thenceforward, a plague to David, and his kingdom, yet he breaks it, and makes David's sword victorious, even before he repented, that this *goodness of God might lead him to repentance*. Good reason had David to own, that God *dealt not with him according to his sins*, Psal. ciii. 10.

2. That Joab acted very honestly and honourably; for when he had taken the city of waters, the royal city, where the palace was, and from which the rest of the city was supplied with water, and therefore, upon the cutting off of that, would be obliged speedily to surrender, he sent to David to come in person, to compleat this great action, that he might have the praise of it, *ver. 26, 27, 28*. Herein he shewed himself a faithful servant, that sought his master's honour, and his own only in subordination to his, and left an example to the servants of the Lord Jesus, in every thing they do, to consult his honour: *Not unto us, but to thy name, give glory*.

3. That David was both too haughty, and too severe, upon this occasion, and neither so humble, nor so tender, as he should have been. 1. He seems to have been too fond of the crown of the king of Ammon, *ver. 30*. because it was of extraordinary value, by reason of the precious stones with which it was set, David will have it set upon his head, though it would have been better to have cast it at God's feet, and, at this time, to have put his own mouth in the dust, being under guilt. The heart that is truly humbled for sin, is dead to worldly glory, and looks upon it with a holy contempt. 2. He seems to have been too harsh with his prisoners of war, *ver. 31*. taking the city by storm, after it had obstinately held out against a long and expensive siege; if he had put all to the sword, in the heat of battle, whom he found in arms, it had been severe enough; but to kill them afterwards, in cold blood, and by cruel tortures, with saws and harrows, tearing them to pieces, did not become him, who, when he entred upon the government, promised to sing of mercy as well as judgment, *Psal. ci. 1*. Had he only made those examples who had abused his ambassadors, advised or assisted in it, that being a violation of the law of nations, it might be looked upon as a piece of necessary justice, for terror to other nations; but to be thus severe with all the cities of the children of Ammon, (*i. e.* the garisons or soldiers of the cities) was extremam rigorous, and a sign that David's heart was not yet made soft by repentance, else the bowels of his compassion would not have been thus shut up; a sign he had not yet found mercy, else he would have been more ready to shew mercy.

C H A P. XIII.

The righteous God had lately told David, by Nathan the prophet, that, to chastise him for his sin in the matter of Uriah, he would raise up evil against him out of his own house, *chap. xii. 11*. and here, in the very next chapter, we find the evil beginning to rise; from henceforward he was followed with one trouble after another, which made the latter part of his reign less glorious and pleasant than the former part. Thus God chastened him with the rod of men, yet assured him, that his loving kindness he would not utterly take away. *Adultery and murder were David's sins, and those sins, among his children, Amnon defiling his sister Tamar, and Absalom murdering his brother Amnon, were the beginnings of his punishment, and the more grievous, because he had reason to fear his bad example might help to bring them to these wickednesses. In this chapter we have, 1. Amnon ravishing Tamar. Assisted in his plot to do it by Jonadab his kinsman, and villainously executing it, ver. 1,---20. 2. Absalom murdering Amnon for it, ver. 21,---39. Both great griefs to David, and the more, because he was unwittingly made accessory to both, by sending Tamar to Amnon, and Amnon to Absalom.*

AND it came to pass after this, that Absalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar, and Amnon the son of David loved her. 2. And Amnon was so vexed, that he fell sick for his sister Tamar; for she *was* a virgin: and Amnon thought it hard for him to do any thing to her. 3. But Amnon had a friend, whose name *was* Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, Davids brother: and Jonadab *was* a very subtil man. 4. And he said unto him, Why art thou, *being* the kings son, lean from day to day? wilt thou not tell me? And Amnon said unto him, I love Tamar, my brother Absaloms sister. 5. And Jonadab said unto him, Lay thee down on thy bed, and make thy self sick: and when thy father cometh to see thee, say unto him, I pray thee, let my sister Tamar come, and give me meat, and dress the meat in my sight, that I may see it, and eat it at her hand. 6. ¶ So Amnon lay down, and made himself sick: and when the king was come to see him, Amnon said unto the king, I pray thee, let Tamar my sister come, and make me a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat at her hand. 7. Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, Go now to thy brother Ammons house, and dress him meat. 8. So Tamar went to her brother Ammons house; (and he was laid down) and she took flour, and kneaded it, and made cakes in his sight, and did bake the cakes. 9. And she took a pan and poured *them* out before him, but he refused to eat. And Amnon said, Have out all men from me: and they went out every man from him. 10. And Amnon said unto Tamar, Bring the meat into the chamber, that I may eat of thine hand. And Tamar took the cakes which she had made, and brought *them* into the chamber, to Amnon her brother. 11. And when she had brought *them* unto him to eat, he took hold of her, and said unto her, Come lie with me, my sister. 12. And she answered him, Nay, my brother, do not force me: for no such thing ought to be done in Israel; do not thou this folly. 13. And I, whether shall I cause my shame to go? and as for thee, thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, speak unto the king; for he will not withhold me from thee. 14. Howbeit, he would not hearken unto her voice: but being stronger than she, forced her, and lay with her. 15. ¶ Then Amnon hated her exceedingly, so that the hatred wherewith he hated her, *was* greater than the love wherewith he had loved her: and Amnon said unto her, Arise, be gone. 16. And she said unto him, *There is* no cause; this evil in sending me away, *is* greater than the other that thou didst unto me: but he would not hearken unto her. 17. Then he called his servant that ministered unto him, and said, Put now this *woman* out from me, and bolt the door after her. 18. And *she* had a garment of divers colours upon her: for with such robes were the kings daughters that *were* virgins apparelled. Then his servant brought her out, and bolted the door after her. 19. ¶ And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that *was* on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying. 20. And Absalom her brother said unto her, Hath Amnon thy brother been with thee? but hold now thy peace, my sister: he is thy brother, regard not this thing. So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absaloms house.

We have here a particular account of the abominable wickedness of Amnon, in ravishing his sister, a subject not fit to be enlarged upon for shame, nor, indeed, to be mentioned without blushing, that ever any man should be so vile, especially, that a son of David should be so. Amnon's character, we have reason to think, was but bad in other things; if he had not forsaken God, he had never been given up to these vile affections. Godly parents have oft been afflicted with wicked children; grace doth not run in a blood, but corruption doth. We do not find that David's children imitated him in his devotion, but his fall steps they trod in, and in those did much worse, and repented not. Parents know not how fatal the consequences may be, if, in any instance, they give their children bad examples. Observe the steps of Amnon's sin.

1. The devil, as an unclean spirit, put it into his heart to lust after his sister Tamar. Beauty is a snare to many, it was so to her, she was fair, and therefore Amnon coveted her, *ver. 1.* They that are more than ordinary comely, have therefore no reason to be proud, but great reason to stand upon their watch. Amnon's lust was, 1. Unnatural in it self, to lust after his sister, which even natural conscience startles at, and cannot think of without horror. Such a spirit of contradiction there is in man's corrupt nature, that still it desires forbidden fruit, and the more strongly it is forbidden the more greedily it is desired. Can he entertain the thought of betraying that virtue and honour which, as a brother, he ought to have been the protector of? But what wickedness so vile, as not to find admittance into an un sanctified unguarded heart left to it self? 2. It was very uneasy to him. He was so vexed, he could not gain an opportunity to solicit her chastity (for an innocent converse with her was not denied him) that he *fell sick*, *ver. 2.* Fleishly lusts are their own punishment, and not only *war against the soul*, but against the body too, and are the *rottenness of the bones*. See what a hard master sinners serve, and how heavy its yoke is.

2. The devil, as a subtle serpent, put it into his head how to compass this wicked design. Amnon had a friend, (so he called him, but he was really an enemy to him) a kinsman, that had in him more of David's blood (for he was his nephew) than of David's spirit, for he was a subtle man, cunning to carry on any ill design, especially an intrigue of this nature, *ver. 3.* 1. He takes notice that Amnon looked ill, and being a subtle man, concludes that he was love sick, *ver. 4.* and asks him, *Why art thou, being the king's son, lean from day to day? Why dost thou pine being the king's eldest son, and heir to the crown. Being the king's son.* (1.) Thou hast the pleasures of the court to divert thee, take those pleasures then, and with them drive away the sorrow, whatever it is. Content and comfort is not always to be found in royal palaces. With much more reason may we ask dejected and disconsolate saints, why they that are the King of kings children, and heirs of the crown of life, are thus *lean from day to day*? (2.) Thou hast the power of a prince to command what thou wantest and wishest for, use that power, therefore, and gratify thy self. Pine not away for that which lawful or unlawful, thou being the king's son, mayest have. *Quicquid libet licet.* Thus Jezebel to Ahab in a like case, *1 Kings xxi. 7.* *Dost not thou govern Israel?* The abuse of power is the most dangerous temptation of great ones.

(2.) Amnon having the impudence to own his wicked lust, mis-calling it love (*I love Tamar*), Jonadab put him in a way to compass his design, *ver. 5.* Had he been what he pretended, Amnon's friend, he would have startled at the mention of so horrid a wickedness, would have laid before him the evil of it, what an offence it was to God, and what a wrong to his own soul, to entertain such a vile thought, of what fatal consequence it would be to him to cherish and prosecute it, would have used his subtilty to divert Amnon from it, by recommending some other person to him whom he might lawfully marry: But he seems not at all surprized at it; objects, not either the unlawfulness, or the difficulty, the reproach, or so much as his father's displeasure; but puts him in the way to get Tamar to his bed's side, and then he might do as he pleased. Note, The case of those is very miserable, whose friends, instead of admonishing and reproving them, flatter them, and forward them in their sinful ways, and are their counsellors and contrivers to do wickedly. Amnon is already sick, but goes about, he must take on him to be so ill, (and his thin looks will give umbrage enough to the pretence) as not to be able to get up, nor to have an appetite to any thing but just that which pleaseth his fancy. Dainty meat is abhorred, *Job xxxiii. 20.* the best dish from the king's table cannot please him, but if he can eat any thing, it must be from his sister Tamar's fair hand. This is what he is advised to.

(3.) Amnon follows these directions, and by that means gets Tamar within his reach. *He made himself sick*, *ver. 6.* Thus he *lieth in wait secretly, as a lion in his den to catch the poor*, and to *draw them into his net*, *Psalms x. 8, 9, 10.* David was always fond of his children, and concerned if any thing ailed them; he no sooner hears that Amnon is sick, but he comes himself to visit him. Let parents learn hence to be tender of their children, and compassionate towards them: The sick child commonly *the mother comforteth*, *Isa. lvi. 13.* but let not the father be unconcerned. We may suppose, David, when he came to see his sick son, gave him good counsel to make a right use of his affliction, and prayed with him, which yet did not alter his wicked purpose. At parting, the indulgent father asks, is there any thing thou hast a mind to that I can procure for thee? Yes, (Sir) saith the dissembling son, my stomach's weak, and I know not of any thing I can eat, unless it be a cake of my sister Tamar's making, and I cannot be satisfied it is so, unless I see her make it, and it will do me the more good if I eat it at her hand. David saw no reason to suspect any mischief intended, God hid his heart from understanding in this matter; he therefore immediately orders Tamar to go and attend her sick brother, *ver. 7.* He doth it very innocently, but afterwards, no doubt, reflected upon it with great regret. Tamar as innocently goes to her brother's chamber, neither dreading any abuse: why

should she from a brother, a sick brother? Not disdaining, in obedience to her father, and love to her brother (though but her half brother), to be his nurse-tender, *ver. 8, 9.* Though she was a king's daughter, a great beauty, *ver. 11.* and well dressed, *ver. 18.* yet she did not think it below her to knead cakes and bake them, nor had she done it now, if she had not been used to it. Good housewifery is not a thing below the greatest ladies, nor ought they to think it a disparagement to them. The virtuous woman whose husband *sits among the elders*, yet *worketh willingly with her hands*, *Prov. xxxi. 13.* Modern ages have not been destitute of such instances, nor is it so unfashionable as some would make it. Preparing for the sick should be more the care and delight of the ladies, than preparing for the nice; charity more than curiosity.

(4.) Having got her to him, he contrives to have her alone; for the adulterer (much more so vile an adulterer as this) is in care that *no eye see him*, *Job xxiv. 15.* The meat is ready, but he cannot eat while he is looked at by those about him, they must all be turned out, *ver. 9.* The sick must be humoured, and think they have a privilege to command. Tamar is willing to humour him, her chaste and virtuous soul has not the least thought of that which his polluted breast is full of; and therefore she makes no scruple of being alone with him *in the inner chamber*, *ver. 10.* And now the mask is thrown off, the meat is thrown by, and the wicked wretch calls her sister, and yet impudently courts her to *come and lie with him*, *ver. 11.* It was a base affront to her virtue, to think it possible to persuade her to consent to such wickedness, when he knew her conversation to be always exemplarily modest and virtuous: But it is common for those that live in uncleanness to think others such as themselves, at least, tinder to their sparks.

3. The devil, as a strong tempter, deafens his ear to all the reasonings with which she resisted his assaults, and would have persuaded him to desist. We may well imagine, what a mighty surprize and terror it was to the young lady to be thus attacked, how she blushed, and how she trembled; yet, in this great confusion, nothing could be said more pertinently, nor with greater strength of argument, than what she said to him.

1. She calls him brother, minding him of the nearness of the relation, which made it unlawful for him to marry her, much more to debauch her. It was expressly forbidden, *Lev. xviii. 9.* under a severe penalty, *Lev. xx. 17.* Great care must be taken, lest the love that should be among relations degenerate into lust.

2. She bespeaks him not to force her, which intimates, that she would never consent to it, in any degree, and what satisfaction could he take in offering violence?

3. She lays before him the great wickedness of it. It is folly; all sin is so, especially uncleanness: it is wickedness of the worst kind: Such abominations ought not to be committed in Israel, among the professing people of God, that have better statutes than the heathen have. We are Israelites, if we do such things we are more inexcusable than others, nay, our condemnation will be more intolerable, for we *reproach the Lord*, and *that worthy name, by which we are called*.

4. She represents to him the shame of it, which, perhaps, might influence him more than the sin of it. For her part, *whither shall I cause my shame to go?* If it should be concealed, yet I shall blush to think of it as long as I live; and if ever it be known, how shall I be able to look any of my friends in the face? For his part, *thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel*, i. e. thou shalt be looked upon as an errant rake, the worst of men; wilt lose thine interest in the esteem of all that are wise and good, and so wilt be set aside as unfit to rule, though the first born: For Israel will never submit to the government of such a fool. Prospect of shame, especially everlasting shame, should deter us from sin.

5. To put him by his wicked purpose at this time, and (if possible) to get clear of him, she intimates to him, that, probably, the king, rather than he should die for love of her, would dispense with the divine law, and let him marry her: not as if she thought he had such a dispensing power, or would pretend to it, but was confident that upon notice given to the king by himself of this wicked desire of his, which he would scarce have believed from any one else, he would take an effectual course to protect her from him.

But all her arts, and all her arguments availed not. His proud spirit cannot bear a denial, but her comfort and honour and all that was dear to her must be sacrificed to his brutish and outrageous lust, *ver. 14.* It is to be feared Amnon, though young, had long lived a lewd life, which his father either knew not, or punished not, for a man could not of a sudden arrive at such a pitch of wickedness as this. But is this his love to Tamar? Is this the recompence he gives her for her readiness to attend him in his sickness? Will he deal with his sister as with a harlot? Base villain! God deliver all that are modest and virtuous, from such wicked and unreasonable men!

4. The devil as a tormentor and betrayer, immediately turns his love of her into hatred, *ver. 15.* *He hated her with great hatred greatly*, so it is in the margin, and grew as outrageous in his malice, as he had been in his lust, basely turned her out of doors by force; nay, as if he now disdained to touch her with his own hands, he ordered his servant to *pull her out*, and *bolt the door after her*, *ver. 17.* Now, (1.) The innocent injured lady had reason to resent

resent this as a great affront, and in some respects (as she saith, *ver.* 16.) worse than the former; for nothing could have been done more barbarous and ill-natured, nor more disgraceful to her. Had he taken care to conceal what was done, her honour had been lost to her self only: Had he gone down on his knees and begged her pardon, it might have been some little reparation of that: Had he given her time to compose her self after the horrid confusion she was put into, she might have kept her countenance when she went out, and so have kept her counsel: But to dismiss her thus hurried, thus rudely, as if she had done some ill thing, obliged her, in her own defence, to proclaim the wrong that had been done her. 2. We may learn from it, both the malignity of sin, unbridled passions are as bad as unbridled appetites; and the mischievous consequences of sin, at last it bites like a serpent; for here we find, (1.) That sins sweet in the commission, afterwards become odious and painful, and the sinner's own conscience makes them so to himself. Amnon hated Tamar, because she would not consent to his wickedness, and so take part of the blame upon her self, but to the last resisted it, and reasoned against it, and so threw it upon him. Had he hated the sin, and loathed himself for it, we might have hoped he was a penitent, *Godly sorrow worketh indignation*, 2 Cor. vii. 11. but to hate the person he had abused, shewed his conscience was terrified, but his heart not at all humbled. See what deceitful pleasures those of the flesh are, how soon the lust passeth away, and turns into loathing, see *Ezek. xxiii. 17.* 2. That sins secret in the commission, afterwards become open and publick, and the sinners themselves often make them so. Their own tongues fall upon them. The Jewish doctors say, that upon the occasion of this wickedness of Amnon a law was made, that a young man and a young woman should never be alone together; for said they, if the king's daughter be so used, what will become of the children of private men?

We must now leave the criminal to the terrors of his own guilty conscience, and enquire what becomes of the poor lady.

1. She bitterly lamented the injury she had received; as it was a stain to her honour, though no real blemish to her virtue. She tore her fine cloths in token of her grief, and put ashes upon her head to deform her self, loathing her own beauty and ornaments, because they had occasioned Amnon's unlawful love; and she went on crying for another's sin, *ver.* 19.

2. She retired to her brother Absalom's house, because he was her own brother, and there she lived in solitude and sorrow, in token of her modesty, and detestation of uncleanness. Absalom spoke kindly to her, bid her pass by the injury for the present, designing himself to revenge it, *ver.* 20. It should seem by Absalom's question, has Amnon been with thee? that Amnon was notorious for such lewd practices, so that it was dangerous for a modest woman to be with him; this the young gentlemen might know, and yet Tamar be wholly ignorant of.

21. ¶ But when king David heard of all these things he was very wroth. 22. And Absalom spake unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar. 23. ¶ And it came to pass after two full years, that Absalom had sheep-shearers in Baal-hazor, which is beside Ephraim: and Absalom invited all the kings sons. 24. And Absalom came to the king, and said, Behold, now thy servant hath sheep-shearers, let the king, I beseech thee, and his servants, go with thy servant. 25. And the king said to Absalom, Nay, my son, let us not all now go, lest we be chargeable unto thee. And he pressed him: howbeit he would not go, but blessed him. 26. Then said Absalom, If not, I pray thee, let my brother Amnon go with us. And the king said unto him, Why should he go with thee? 27. But Absalom pressed him, that he let Amnon and all the kings sons go with him. 28. ¶ Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Ammons heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon, then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant. 29. And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded: then all the kings sons arose, and every man gat him upon his mule, and fled.

What Solomon saith of the beginning of strife, is true of the beginning of all sin, it is as the letting forth of water; when once the flood-gates are plucked up, an inundation follows; one mischief begets another, and it is hard to say, what shall be in the end thereof.

1. We are here told, how David repented the tidings of Amnon's sin, he was very wroth, *ver.* 21. So he had reason to be, that his own son should do such a wicked thing, and draw him to

Nº. 23.

be necessary to it. It would be a reproach to him, for not giving him better education, a blot upon his family, the ruin of his pretty daughter, an ill example to his kingdom, and a wrong to his son's soul: but was it enough for him to be angry? He ought to have punished his son for it, and to have put him to open shame; both as a father, and as a king, he had power to do it: But the Septuagint here adds these words: *But he sadned not the spirit of his son Amnon, because he loved him, because he was the first-born.* He fell into Eli's error, whose sons made themselves vile, and he frowned not on them. If Amnon was dear to him, his punishing him would have been so much the greater punishment to himself for his own uncleanness, and a revenge upon himself. But he cannot bear the shame those must submit to, who correct that in others which they are conscious of in themselves, and therefore his anger must serve instead of his justice, and this hardens sinners, *Ecc. viii. 11.*

2. How Absalom repented it. He resolves already to do the part of a judge in Israel, and since his father will not punish Amnon he will, from a principle not of justice, or zeal for virtue, but of revenge; because he reckons himself affronted in the abuse done to his sister: Their mother was daughter to a heathen prince, *chap. iii. 3.* which, perhaps, they were upbraided with sometimes by their brethren, as children of a stranger, as such a one Absalom thought his sister was now treated; and if Amnon thought her fit to be made his whore, he would think him fit to be made his slave; this enraged him, and nothing less than the blood of Amnon will quench his rage. Here we have,

1. The design conceived. *Absalom hated Amnon*, *ver.* 22. and *he that hateth his brother is a murderer* already, and like *Cain is of that wicked one*, 1 John iii. 12, 15. Absalom's hatred of his brother's crime had been commendable, and his prosecuting of him for it by a due course of law, for example to others, and the making of some compensation to his injured sister; but to hate his person, and design his death by assassination was, to put a great affront upon God, by offering to repair the breach of his seventh commandment by the violation of his sixth, as if they were not at all alike sacred: *But he that said, do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill*, James ii. 11.

2. The design concealed. He said nothing to Amnon of this matter either good or bad, took on him as if he did not know it, but carried it towards him with his usual civility, only waiting for a fair opportunity to do him a mischief. That malice is the worst, 1. Which is hid close, and has no vent given to it. If Absalom had reasoned the matter with Amnon, he might have convinced him of his sin, and brought him to repentance; but saying nothing, Amnon's heart was hardened, and his own more and more embittered against him, therefore rebuking our neighbour is opposed to hating him in our hearts, *Lev. xix. 17.* Let passion have vent, and it will spend it self. 2. Which is gilded over with shews of usual friendship, so Absalom's was, *his words smoother than butter, but war in his heart.* See *Pro. xxvi. 26.* 3. Which is harboured long; two full years Absalom nursed this root of bitterness, *ver.* 23. It may be at first, he did not intend to kill his brother, for if he had, he could not want as fair an opportunity to do it as he had at last, only he waited an occasion to disgrace him, or do him some other ill turn; but in time his hatred ripened to this, that he would be no less than the death of him. If the *sun going down once upon the wrath, gives such place to the devil* as is intimated, *Eph. iv. 26, 27.* what would the sun-sets of two full years do?

3. The design laid. 1. Absalom has a feast at his house in the country, as Nabal had on occasion of his sheep-shearing, *ver.* 23. As great a beau as Absalom was (*chap. xiv. 26.*) and as high as he looked, he *knew the state of his flocks, and looked well to his herds*: Those that have no other care about their estates in the country, but how to spend them in the town, take a ready way to see the end of them: When Absalom had sheep-shearers, he would himself be with them. 2. To this feast he invites the king, his father, and all the princes of the blood; *ver.* 24. not only that he might have this opportunity to pay his respects to them, but that he might make himself the more respected among his neighbours. Those that are akin to great folks, are apt to value themselves too much by their kindred. 3. The king would not go himself, because he would not put him to the expence of his entertainment, *ver.* 25. It seems, Absalom had an estate in his own hands, on which he lived like himself, the king had given it him, but would have him to be a good husband of it; in both these he is an example to parents, when their children are grown up to give them a competency to live upon, according to their rank, and then to take care that they do not live above it, especially that they be no way necessary to their doing so. It is prudence for young house-keepers to begin as they can hold out, and not to spend the wool upon the shearing of it. 4. Absalom got leave for Amnon, and all the rest of the king's sons to come and grace his table in the country, *ver.* 26, 27. Absalom had so effectually concealed his enmity to Amnon, that David saw no reason to suspect any design upon him in that particular invitation, however, let my brother Amnon go; but this would make the stroke more cutting to David, that he was himself drawn in to consent to that which gave the opportunity for it, as before, *ver.* 7. It seems, David's sons, though grown

up, continued to pay that deference to their father, as not to go such a small journey as this without his leave. Thus ought children, even when they are become men and women, to honour their parents, advise with them, and do nothing material without their consent, much less against their mind.

4. The design executed, *ver.* 28, 29. 1. Absalom's entertainment was very plentiful, for he resolves they shall all be merry with wine, at least concludes, that Amnon will be so, for he knew him apt to drink to excess. But, 2. The orders he gave to his servants concerning Amnon, that they should mingle his blood with his wine, were very barbarous. Had he challenged him, and, in reliance upon the goodness of his cause, and the justice of God, fought him himself, though that had been bad enough, yet it had been more honourable and excusable; our ancient law, in some cases, allowed trial by battle: but to murder him, as he did, was to copy out Cain's example, only that the reason made a great difference; Abel was slain for his righteousness, Amnon for his wickedness. Observe the aggravations of this sin: 1. He would have Amnon slain, *when his heart was merry with wine*, and he was, consequently, least apprehensive of danger, and least able to resist it; but least fit to go out of the world: as if his malice aimed to destroy both soul and body, not giving him time to say, *Lord, have mercy upon me*. What a dreadful surprize has death been to many, whose hearts have been *overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness*? 2. His servants must be employed to do it, and so involved in the guilt. He was to give the word of command, *Smite Amnon*, and then they, in obedience to him, and upon presumption that his authority would bear them out, must *kill him*. What an impious defiance doth he bid to the divine law, when, though the command of God is express, *Thou shalt not kill*, he bids them kill Amnon, with this warrant, *Have not I commanded you?* That is enough; *Be courageous*, and fear neither God nor man. Those servants are ill taught, and those are wicked masters that have taught them to obey them in contradiction to God. Those are too obsequious that will damn their souls to please their masters, whose big words cannot secure them from God's wrath. Masters must always command their servants, as those that know they also have a Master in heaven. (3.) He did it in the presence of *all the king's sons*, of whom it is said, *chap.* viii. 18. that they were *chief rulers*; so that it was an affront to publick justice, which they had the administration of, and to the king his father, whom they represented, and a contempt of that sword which should have been a terror to his evil deeds; while his evil deeds, on the contrary, were a terror to them that bare it. (4.) There is reason to suspect, that Absalom did this, not only to revenge his sister's quarrel, but to make way for himself to the throne; which he was ambitious of, and which he would stand fair for, if Amnon, the eldest son, was taken off.

When the word of command was given, Absalom's servants failed not to execute it, being buoyed up with an opinion, that their master, being now next heir to the crown, (for Chileab was dead, as bishop Patrick thinks) would save them harmless. Now the threatened sword is drawn in David's house, which should not depart from it. 1. His eldest son falls by it, himself being, by his wickedness, the cause of it, and his father, by his connivance, accessory to it. 2. All his sons flee from it, and come home in a mighty fright, not knowing how far their brother Absalom's bloody design might extend. See what mischief sin makes in families.

30. ¶ And it came to pass, while they were in the way, that tidings came to David, saying, Absalom hath slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left. 31. Then the king arose, and tare his garments, and lay on the earth; and all his servants stood by with their clothes rent. 32. And Jonadab the son of Shimeah David's brother, answered and said, Let not my lord suppose *that* they have slain all the young men the king's sons; for Amnon only is dead: for by the appointment of Absalom this hath been determined, from the day that he forced his sister Tamar. 33. Now therefore, let not my lord the king take the thing to his heart, to think that all the king's sons are dead: for Amnon only is dead. 34. But Absalom fled. And the young man that kept the watch, lift up his eyes, and looked, and behold, there came much people by the way of the hill-side behind him. 35. And Jonadab said unto the king, Behold, the king's sons come: as thy servant said, so it is. 36. And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of speaking, that behold, the king's sons came, and lift up their voice and wept: and the king also, and all his servants wept very sore. 37. ¶ But Absalom fled, and went to Talmaj, the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur: and David mourned for his son every day. 38. So Absalom fled,

and went to Geshur, and was there three years. 39. And *the soul of king David* longed to go forth unto Absalom: for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead.

Here is, 1. The great fright that David was put into by a false report brought to Jerusalem, that Absalom had *slain all the king's sons*, *ver.* 30. It is common for fame to make ill worse; and the first news of such a thing as this, represents it more dreadful, than afterwards it proves. Let us not therefore be afraid of evil tidings, while they want confirmation, but when we hear the worst, hope the best, at least, hope better. However, these false news gave as much affliction to David, for the present, as if it had been true, he *tare his garments, and lay on the earth*, while, as yet, it was only a flying story, *ver.* 31. It was well David had grace, he had need enough of it, for he had strong passions.

2. The rectifying of the mistake two ways. 1. By the fly suggestions of Jonadab, David's nephew, who could tell him, *Amnon only is dead*, and not all the king's sons, *ver.* 32, 33. and could tell him too, it was done by the appointment of Absalom, and designed from the day he forced his sister Tamar. What a wicked man was he, if he knew all this, or had any cause to suspect it, that he did not make David acquainted with it sooner, that means might have been used to take up the quarrel, or, at least, that David might not have thrown Amnon into the mouth of danger, by letting him go to Absalom's house. If we do not our utmost to prevent mischief, we make our selves accessory to it: *If we say, behold, we knew it not, doth not he that pondereth the heart consider, whether we did or no?* See *Prov.* xxiv. 11, 12. It is well if Jonadab was not as guilty of Amnon's death, as he was of his sin; such friends do they prove, who are hearkened to as counsellors to do wickedly: he that would not be so kind as to prevent Amnon's sin, neither would he be so kind as to prevent his ruin, when, it should seem, he might have done both. 2. By the safe return of all the king's sons, except Amnon. They, and their attendants, were presently discovered by the watch, *ver.* 34, 35. and soon arrived to shew themselves alive, but to bring the certain sad news that Absalom had murdered their brother Amnon. The grief David had been in for that which was not, made him the better able to bear that which was, by giving him a sensible occasion, when he was undeceived, to thank God, that all his sons were not dead: yet, that Amnon was dead, and slain by his own brother, in such a treacherous barbarous manner, was enough to put the king and court, the king and kingdom, into real mourning. Sorrow is never more reasonable, than when there is sin in the case.

3. Absalom's flight from justice. *Absalom* immediately *fled*, *ver.* 34. He was now as much afraid of the king's sons, as they were of him; they fled from his malice, he from their justice: no part of the land of Israel could shelter him, the cities of refuge gave no protection to a wilful murderer; though David had let Amnon's incest go unpunished, Absalom could not promise himself his pardon for this murder; so express was the law in this case, and so well known David's justice, and his dread of blood-guiltiness. He therefore made the best of his way to his mother's relations, and was entertained by his grandfather *Talmaj, king of Geshur*, *ver.* 37. and there he was protected *three years*, *ver.* 38. David not demanding him, and Talmaj not thinking himself obliged to send him back, unless he were demanded.

4. David's uneasiness for his absence. He mourned for Amnon a good while, *ver.* 37. but, he being past recal, time wore off that grief, he was *comforted concerning Amnon*: It also wore off too much his detestation of Absalom's sin; instead of loathing him, as a murderer, he *longs to go forth to him*, *ver.* 39. At first he could not find in his heart to do justice on him, now he can almost find in his heart to take him into his favour again. This was David's infirmity; something God saw in his heart that made a difference, else we should have thought, that he, as much as Eli, *honoured his sons more than God*.

C H A P. XIV.

How Absalom threw himself out of his royal father's protection and favour we read in the foregoing chapter, which left him an exile, outlawed, and proscribed; in this chapter we have the arts that were used to bring him and his father again, and how at last it was done; which is here recorded, to shew the folly of David, in sparing him, and indulging him in his wickedness, for which he was soon after soundly corrected, by his unnatural rebellion. 1. *Joab, by bringing a feigned issue (as the lawyers speak) to be tried before him, in the case of a poor widow of Tekoah, gains from him a judgment in general, That the case might be so, as that the putting of a murderer to death, ought to be dispensed with,* *ver.* 1,—20. 2. *Upon the application of this, he gains from him an order to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem, while*

while yet he was forbidden the court, ver. 21,---24. 3. After an account of Absalom, his person and family, we are told, how, at length, he was introduced, by Joab, into the king's presence, and the king was thoroughly reconciled to him, ver. 25,---33.

1. **N**OW Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king's heart was toward Absalom. 2. And Joab sent to Tekoah, and fetcht thence a wise woman, and said unto her, I pray thee, feign thy self to be a mourner, and put on now mourning apparel, and anoint not thy self with oil, but be as a woman that had a long time mourned for the dead: 3. And come to the king, and speak on this manner unto him: So Joab put the words in her mouth. 4. ¶ And when the woman of Tekoah spake to the king, she fell on her face to the ground, and did obeisance, and said, Help, O king. 5. And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, I *am* indeed a widow woman, and mine husband is dead. 6. And thy handmaid had two sons, and they two strove together in the field, and *there was* none to part them, but the one smote the other, and slew him. 7. And behold, the whole family is risen against thine handmaid, and they said, Deliver him that smote his brother, that we may kill him, for the life of his brother whom he slew, and we will destroy the heir also: and so they shall quench my coal which is left, and shall not leave to my husband *neither* name nor remainder upon the earth. 8. And the king said unto the woman, Go to thine house, and I will give charge concerning thee. 9. And the woman of Tekoah said unto the king, My lord, O king, the iniquity *be* on me, and on my fathers house: and the king and his throne *be* guiltless. 10. And the king said, Whosoever saith *ought* unto thee, bring him to me, and he shall not touch thee any more. 11. Then said she, I pray thee, let the king remember the LORD thy God, that thou wouldst not suffer the revengers of blood to destroy any more, lest they destroy my son. And he said, *As* the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth. 12. Then the woman said, Let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak *one* word unto my lord the king. And he said, Say on. 13. And the woman said, Wherefore then hast thou thought such a thing against the people of God? for the king doth speak this thing, as one which is faulty, in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished. 14. For we must needs die, and *are* as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again: neither doth God respect *any* person, yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him. 15. Now therefore that I am come to speak of this thing unto my lord the king, *it is* because the people have made me afraid: and thy handmaid said, I will now speak unto the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his handmaid. 16. For the king will hear, to deliver his handmaid out of the hand of the man *that would* destroy me and my son together out of the inheritance of God: 17. Then thine handmaid said, The word of my lord the king shall now be comfortable: for as an angel of God, so *is* my lord the king, to discern good and bad: therefore the LORD thy God will be with thee. 18. Then the king answered and said unto the woman, Hide not from me, I pray thee, the thing that I shall ask thee. And the woman said, Let my lord the king now speak. 19. And the king said, *Is not* the hand of Joab with thee in all this? And the woman answered and said, *As* thy soul liveth, my lord the king, none can turn to the right hand or to the left from ought that my lord the king hath spoken: for thy servant Joab he bade me, and he put all these words in the mouth of thine handmaid. 20. To fetch about this form of speech hath thy servant Joab done this thing: and my lord *is* wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all *things* that *are* in the earth.

Here is, 1. Joab's design to get Absalom recalled out of banishment, his crime pardoned, and his attainder reversed, ver. 1.

Joab made himself very busy in this affair. 1. As a courtier, that was studious, by all ways possible, to ingratiate himself with his prince, and improve his interest in his favour: he *perceived* that the king's heart was towards Absalom, and that, the heat of his displeasure being over, he still retained his old affection for him, and only wanted a friend to court him to be reconciled, and to contrive for him how he might do it, without impeachment of the honour of his justice: Joab, finding which way David's pulse beat, undertook this good office. 2. As a friend to Absalom, whom, perhaps, he had a particular kindness for, at least looked upon him as the rising sun, to whom it was his interest to recommend himself. He plainly foresaw his father would, at length, be reconciled to him, and therefore thought he would make both his friends, if he were instrumental to bring it about. 3. As a statesman, and one concerned for the publick welfare. He knew how much Absalom was the darling of the people; and if David should die, while he was in banishment, it might occasion a civil war between those that were for him, and those that were against him, for, it is probable, though all Israel loved his person, yet they were much divided upon his case. 4. As one that was himself a delinquent, by the murder of Abner; he was conscious to himself of the guilt of blood, and that he was himself obnoxious to publick justice, and therefore, whatever favour he could procure to be shewn to Absalom, would corroborate his reprieve.

2. His contrivance to do it, by laying somewhat of a parallel case before the king, which was done so dextrously, by the person he employed, that the king took it for a real case, and gave judgment upon it, as he had done upon Nathan's parable; and the judgment being in favour of the criminal, the manager might, by that, discover his sentiments so far, as to venture upon the application of it, and to shew, that it was the case of his own family, which, it is probable, she was instructed not to proceed to, if the king's judgment, upon her case, had been severe.

(1.) The person he employed is not named, but is said to be a woman of Tekoah, one whom he knew to be fit for such an undertaking: and it was requisite the scene should be laid at a distance, that David might not think it strange he had not heard of it before. It is said she was a *wise woman*, one that had a quicker wit, and a readier tongue, than most of her neighbours, ver. 2. the truth of the story would be the less suspected, when it came, as was supposed, from the person's own mouth.

(2.) The character she put on was that of a disconsolate widow, ver. 2. Joab knew such a one would have an easy access to the king, who was always ready to comfort the mourners, especially the mourning widows, having himself mentioned it among the titles of God's honour, that he is a *judge of the widows*, Psalm lxviii. 5. God's ear, no doubt, is more open to the cries of the afflicted, and his heart too, than that of the most merciful princes on earth could be.

(3.) It was a case of compassion which she had to represent to the king, and a case, in which she could have no relief, but from the chancery in the royal breast, the law, (and, consequently, the judgment of all the inferior courts) being against her. She tells the king that she had buried her husband, ver. 5. that she had two sons that were the support and comfort of her widowed state; that these two (as young men are apt to do) fell out and fought, and one of them unhappily killed the other, ver. 6. that, for her part, she was desirous to protect the manslayer, for, as Rebekah argued concerning her two sons, *Why should she be deprived of them both in one day?* Gen. xxvii. 46. But though she, who was nearest of kin to the slain, was willing to let fall the demands of an avenger of blood, yet the other relations insisted upon it, that the surviving brother should be put to death, according to law, not out of any affection, either to justice, or to the memory of the slain brother, but that, by destroying the heir, (which they had the impudence to own, was the thing they aimed at) the inheritance might be theirs: and by this means they would cut off, 1. Her comfort; *they shall quench my coal*, deprive me of the only support of my old age, and put a period to all my joy in this world, which is reduced to this one coal. 2. Her husband's memory; his family will be quite extinct, and they will *leave him neither name nor remainder*, ver. 7.

(4.) The king promised her his favour, and a protection for her son. Observe how she grew upon the king's compassionate concessions. 1. Upon the representation of her case, he promised to consider of it, and to give order about it, ver. 8. This was encouraging, that he did not dismiss her petition with *curat lex*, let the law take its course; blood calls for blood, and let it have what it calls for: but he will take time to enquire, whether the allegations of her petition be true. 2. The woman is not content with this, but begs that he would immediately give judgment in her favour, and, if the matter of fact were not as she represented it, and consequently a wrong judgment given upon it, let her bear the blame, and free *the king and his throne from guilt*, ver. 9. yet her saying this would not acquit the king, if he should pass sentence, without taking due cognizance of the case. 3. Being thus pressed, he makes a further promise, that she should not be injured or insulted by her adversaries, but he would protect her from all molestation, ver. 10. Magistrates ought to be the patrons of oppressed widows.

widows. 4. Yet this doth not content her, unless she can get her son's pardon, and a protection for him too. Parents are not easy unless their children be safe, safe for both worlds; *ver. 11. let not the avenger of blood destroy my son*, for I am undone if I lose him; as good take my life as his. *Therefore let the king remember the Lord thy God*, i. e. (1.) Let him confirm this merciful sentence with an oath, making mention of the Lord our God, by way of appeal to him, that the sentence may be indisputable, and irreversible, and then I shall be easy. See *Heb. vi. 17, 18.* (2.) Let him consider what good reason there is for this merciful sentence, and then he himself will be confirmed in it. Remember how gracious and merciful *the Lord thy God* is, how he bears long with sinners, and doth not deal with them according to their deserts, but is ready to forgive. Remember how *the Lord thy God* spared Cain, who slew his brother, and protected him from the avengers of blood, *Gen. iv. 15.* Remember how *the Lord thy God* forgave thee the blood of Uriah; and let the king, that has found mercy, shew mercy. Note, Nothing is more proper, or more powerful, to engage us to every duty, especially to all acts of mercy and kindness, than to remember the Lord our God. (3.) This importunate widow, by pressing the matter thus close, obtains at last a full pardon for her son, ratified with an oath as she desired, *As the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth*, i. e. I will undertake he shall come to no damage upon this account. The son of David hath assured all that put themselves under his protection, that, though they should be put to death for his sake, *not a hair of their head should perish*, *Luke xxi. 16, 18.* though they should lose for him, they should not lose by him. Whether David did well thus to undertake the protection of a murderer, whom the cities of refuge would not protect, I cannot say. But as the matter of fact appeared to him, there was not only great reason for compassion to the mother, but room enough for a favourable judgment concerning the son: he had slain his brother, but he *hated him not in time past*; it was upon a sudden provocation, and, for ought appeared, it might be done in his own defence. He pleaded not this himself, but the judge must be of counsel for the prisoner, and therefore *let mercy*, at this time, *rejoice against judgment*.

(5.) The case being thus adjudged in favour of her son, it is now time to apply it to the king's son, Absalom. The mask here begins to be thrown off, and another scene opened; the king is surprised, but not at all displeased, to find his humble petitioner of a sudden become his reprover, his privy-counsellor, an advocate for the prince his son, and the mouth of the people, undertaking to represent to him their sense. She begs his pardon, and his patience, for what she had further to say, *ver. 12.* and has leave to say it, the king being very well pleased with her wit and humour.

1. She supposeth Absalom's case to be, in effect, the same with that which she had put as her son's, and therefore, if the king would protect her son, though he had slain his brother, much more ought he to protect his own, and to *fetch home his banished*, *ver. 13.* *Mutato nomine de te fabula narratur.* She names not Absalom, nor needed she to name him, David longed so much after him, and had him so much in his thoughts, that he was soon aware whom she meant by his banished. And in those two words, were two arguments which the king's tender spirit felt the force of: he is banished, and has for three years undergone the disgrace and terror, and all the inconveniencies of banishment: *sufficient to such a one is this punishment*: but he is thy banished, thy own son, a piece of thy self, thy dear son, whom thou lovest.

It is true, Absalom's case differed very much from that which she had put: Absalom did not slay his brother upon a hasty passion, but maliciously, and upon an old grudge: not in the field, where there were no witnesses, but at the table, before all his guests. Absalom was not an only son, as hers was, David had many more, and one lately born, more likely to be his successor than Absalom, for he was called Jedidiah, because God loved him. But David was himself too well affected to the cause, to be critical in his remarks upon the disparity of the cases, and was more desirous than she could be, to bring that favourable judgment to his own son, which he had given concerning hers.

2. She reasons upon it with the king, to persuade him to recal Absalom out of banishment, give him his pardon, and take him into his favour again.

1. She pleads the interest which the people of Israel had in him. What is done against him, is done *against the people of God*, who have their eye upon him as heir of the crown, at least have their eye upon the house of David in general, with which the covenant is made, and which therefore they cannot see the diminution and decay of, by the fall of so many of its branches in the flower of their age. Therefore *the king speaks as one that is faulty*, for he will provide that my husband's name and memory be not cut off, and yet takes no care, though his own be in danger, which is of more value and importance than ten thousand of ours.

2. She pleads man's mortality, *ver. 14. we must needs die*, it is appointed for us, we cannot avoid the thing it self, nor defer it till another time: We are all under a fatal necessity of dying, and when we are dead we are past recal, as water spilt upon the ground, nay, even while we are alive we are so, we have lost our immor-

talities, past retrieve: Amnon must have died some time, if Absalom had not killed him, and if Absalom be now put to death for killing him, that will not bring him to life again. This was poor reasoning, and would serve against the punishment of any murderer: But it should seem, Amnon was a man ill-beloved by the people, and his death little lamented, and it was generally thought hard that so dear a life as Absalom's, should go for one so little valued as Amnon's.

3. She pleads God's mercy, and his clemency towards poor guilty sinners. *God doth not take away the soul, or life, but deviseth means that his banished*, his children that have offended him, and are obnoxious to his justice, as Absalom is to thine, *be not for ever expelled from him*, *ver. 14.* Here are two great instances of the mercy of God to sinners, properly urged as reasons for shewing mercy. (1.) The patience he exerciseth towards them. His law is broken, yet he doth not presently take away the life of those that break it: doth not strike sinners dead, as justly he might, in the act of sin, but bears with them, and waits to be gracious. God's vengeance had suffered Absalom to live, why then should not David's justice suffer him? (2.) The provision he has made for their restoration to his favour, that though by sin they have banished themselves from him, yet they might not be expelled, or cast off for ever. Atonement might be made for sinners by sacrifice: lepers, and others ceremonially unclean were banished, but provision was made for their cleansing, that, though for a time excluded, they might not be finally expelled. The state of sinners is a state of banishment from God. Poor banished sinners are likely to be for ever expelled from God, if some course be not taken to prevent it: it is against the mind of God that they should be so, for he is not willing that any should perish: infinite wisdom has devised proper means to prevent it; so that it is sinners own fault if they be cast off: And this instance of God's good will towards us all, should incline us to be merciful and compassionate one towards another, *Mat. xviii. 32, 33.*

(6.) She concludes her address with a great deal of complement to the king, and mighty expressions of her assurance, that he would do what was just and kind, both in the one case and in the other, *ver. 15, 16, 17.* for as if the case had been real, still she addresseth for her self and her son, yet meaning Absalom.

1. She would not have troubled the king thus, but that the people made her afraid. Understanding it of her own case, all her neighbours made her apprehensive of the ruin she and her son were upon the brink of, from the avengers of blood, the terror of which made her thus bold in her applications to the king himself: Understanding it of Absalom's case, she gives the king to understand what he did not know before, that the nation was disgusted at his severity towards Absalom, to that degree, that she was really afraid it would occasion a general mutiny or insurrection, for the preventing of which great mischief, she ventured to speak to the king himself. The fright she was in, must excuse her rudeness.

2. She applied herself to him with a great confidence in his wisdom and clemency. I said *I will speak to the king* my self, and ask no body to speak for me, for the king will hear reason, even from so mean a creature as I am, will hear the cries of the oppressed, and will not suffer the poorest of his subjects to be *destroyed out of the inheritance of God*, i. e. driven out of the land of Israel, to seek for shelter among the uncircumcised; as Absalom is, whose case is so much the worse, that being *shut out of the inheritance of God*, he wants God's law and ordinances which might help to bring him to repentance; and is in danger of being infected with the idolatry of the heathen, among whom he sojourns, and of bringing home the infection afterwards. To engage the king to grant her request, she expresseth her self very confidently, that his answer would be comfortable, and such as angels bring, (as bishop Patrick explains it) who are messengers of divine mercy. What this woman saith by way of complement, the prophet saith by way of promise, *Zech. xii. 8.* that when *the weak shall be as David, the house of David shall be as the angel of the Lord.* And in order to this, *the Lord thy God will be with thee*, to assist thee in this and every judgment thou givest. Great expectations are great engagements, especially to persons of honour to do their utmost, not to disappoint those that depend upon them.

Lastly, The hand of Joab is suspected by the king, and acknowledged by the woman to be in all this, *ver. 18, 19, 20.*

1. The king soon suspected it. For he could not think such a woman as this would have addressed to him in a matter of such moment, of her own head: And he knew none so likely to set her on as Joab, who was a politick man, and a friend of Absalom's.

2. The woman very honestly owned it. Thy servant Joab he bad me. If it be well done, let him have the thanks; if ill, let him bear the blame. Though she found it very agreeable to the king; yet she would not take the praise of it to her self, but speaks the truth as it was, and gives us an example to do likewise, and never to tell a lie for the concealing of a well managed fraud, *Dare to be true, nothing can need a lie.*

21. ¶ And the king said unto Joab, Behold now, I have done this thing: go therefore, bring the young man

man Absalom again. 22. And Joab fell to the ground on his face, and bowed himself, and thanked the king: and Joab said, To day thy servant knoweth that I have found grace in thy sight, my lord, O king, in that the king hath fulfilled the request of his servant. 23. So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. 24. And the king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face. 25. ¶ But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom, for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head, there was no blemish in him. 26. And when he polled his head (for it was at every years end that he polled it: because the hair was heavy on him, therefore he polled it) he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels after the king's weight. 27. And unto Absalom there were born three sons and one daughter, whose name was Tamar, she was a woman of a fair countenance.

Here is, 1. Order given for the bringing back of Absalom; the errand on which the woman came to David was so agreeable, and her management of it so very ingenious and surprizing; that he was now got into a wonderful good humour: *Go* (saith he to Joab) *bring the young man Absalom again*, ver. 21. He was himself inclined to favour him; yet for the honour of his justice he would not do it, but upon intercession made for him, which may illustrate the methods of divine grace: It is true, God has thoughts of compassion towards poor sinners, not willing that any should perish, yet he is reconciled to them through a mediator, who intercedes with him on their behalf, and to whom he has given these orders, *go, bring them again: God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself*, and he came to this land of our banishment to bring us to God.

Joab having received these orders, 1. Returns thanks to the king for doing him the honour to employ him in an affair so universally grateful, ver. 22. Joab took it as a kindness to himself, and (some think) as an indication, that he would never call him to an account for the murder he had been guilty of: But if he meant so, he was mistaken, as we shall find, 1 Kings ii. 5; 6. 2. Delays not to put them in execution: he brought Absalom to Jerusalem, ver. 23. I see not how David can be justified in suspending the execution of the ancient law, Gen. ix. 6. *Who so sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed*, in which a righteous magistrate ought not to acknowledge even his brethren, or know his own children. God's laws were never designed to be like cobwebs which catch the little flies, but suffer the great ones to break through. God justly made Absalom a scourge to him, whom his foolish pity thus spared. But though he allowed him to return to his own house, he forbade him the court, and would not see him himself, ver. 24. he put him under this interdict, (1.) For his own honour, that he might not seem to countenance so great a criminal, nor to forgive him too easily. (2.) For Absalom's greater humiliation. Perhaps he had heard something of his carriage, when Joab went to fetch him, which gave him too much reason to think he was not truly penitent, he therefore put him under this mark of his displeasure, that he might be awakened to a sight of his sin, and sorrow for it, and might make his peace with God, upon the first notice of which, no doubt, David would be forward to receive him again into his favour.

2. Occasion taken from hence to give an account of Absalom. Nothing is said of his wisdom and piety; though he was the son of such a devout father, we read nothing of his devotion; parents cannot give grace to their children, though they give them never so good education: All that is here said of him is, 1. That he was a very handsome man; there was not his fellow in all Israel for beauty, ver. 25. A poor commendation for a man that had nothing else in him valuable. Handsome are they that handsome do. Many a polluted deformed soul dwells in a fair and comely body, witness Absalom's, that was polluted with blood, and deformed with unnatural disaffection to his father and prince: In his body there was no blemish, but in his mind nothing but wounds and bruises. Perhaps, this was one reason why his father was so fond of him, and protected him from justice. Those have reason to fear affliction in their children, who are better pleased with their beauty than with their virtue. 2. That he had a very fine head of hair. Whether it was the length or colour, or extraordinary softness of it, something there was which made it very valuable, and very much an ornament to him, ver. 26. This notice is taken of his hair, not as a Nazarite (he was far from that strictness) but as a beau. He let it grow till it was a burthen to him, and was heavy on him, nor would he cut it, as long as ever he could bear it; as pride feels no cold, so it feels no heat, and that which feeds and gratifies it, is not complained of, though very uneasy. When he did poll it at certain times, for ostentation he had it

weighed, that it might be seen how much it excelled other mens, and it weighed two hundred shekels, which some reckon to be three pound and two ounces of our weight; and with the oil and powder, especially if it were powdered (as Josephus saith the fashion then was) with gold dust; bishop Patrick thinks it is not at all incredible that it should weigh so much. This fine hair proved his halter, chap. xviii. 9. 3. That his family began to be built up. It is probable he was a good while before he had a child, and then it was, that despairing of having one, he set up that pillar which is mentioned, chap. xviii. 18. to bear up his name; but afterwards he had three sons, and one pretty daughter, ver. 27. Or, perhaps, these sons, while he was hatching his rebellion, were all cut off by the righteous hand of God; and thereupon he set that monument.

28. ¶ So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face. 29. Therefore Absalom sent for Joab, to have sent him to the king, but he would not come to him: and when he sent again the second time, he would not come. 30. Therefore he said unto his servants, See, Joab's field is near mine; and he hath barley there; go and set it on fire: And Absalom's servants set the field on fire. 31. Then Joab arose and came to Absalom unto his house, and said unto him, Wherefore have thy servants set my field on fire? 32. And Absalom answered Joab, Behold, I sent unto thee, saying, Come hither, that I may send thee to the king, to say, Wherefore am I come from Geshur? *it had been good for me to have been there still*: now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me. 33. So Joab came to the king, and told him: and when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom.

Three years Absalom had been an exile with his father-in-law, and now two years a prisoner at large in his own house, and in both better dealt with than he deserved, and yet his spirit was still unhumbled, his pride unmortified, and instead of being thankful that his life is spared, he thinks himself sorely wronged that he is not restored to all his places at court. Had he truly repented of his sin, his distance from the gaieties of the court, and his solitude and retirement in his own house, especially being in Jerusalem the holy city, would have been very agreeable to him. If a murderer must live, yet let him be for ever a recluse. But Absalom cannot bear this just and gentle mortification: He longs to see the king's face, pretending it was because he loved him, but really because he wanted an opportunity to supplant him. He cannot do his father a mischief, till he is reconciled to him; this therefore is the first branch of his plot; this snake cannot sting again, till he be warmed in his father's bosom: How he gained this point, not by pretended submissions and promises of reformation, but (would you think it?) by huffing and hectoring. We are here told;

1. By his insolent carriage toward Joab, he brought him to mediate for him. Once, and again he sent to Joab to come speak with him, for he durst not go to him, but Joab would not come at him, ver. 29. probably because Absalom had not owned the kindness he had done him; in bringing him to Jerusalem so gratefully as he thought he should have done; proud men take every service done them for a due debt. Now one would have thought a person in Absalom's circumstances should have sent to speak to Joab fair, and offer him a large gratuity, should have made him a noble present; courtiers expect it; no, he bids his servants set Joab's corn fields on fire, ver. 30. as spiteful a thing as he could do: Sampson could not think of a greater injury to do the Philistines than this. Strange, that Absalom should think by doing Joab a mischief, to prevail with him to do him a kindness: or to recommend himself to the favour of his prince or people, by shewing himself so very malicious and ill-natured, and such an enemy to the publick good, for the fire might spread to others corn. Yet, by this means, he brings Joab to him, ver. 31. Thus God by afflictions brings those to him that kept at a distance from him. Absalom was obliged by the law to make restitution, Exod. xxii. 6. yet we do not find that either he offered it, or that Joab demanded it: Joab (it may be) thought it could not justify his refusal to come to speak with him, and therefore Absalom thought he could justify his taking this way to fetch him. And now Joab (perhaps, frightened at the surprizing boldness and fury of Absalom, and apprehensive that he had made an interest in the people strong enough to bear him out in doing the most daring things, else he would never have done this) not only puts up this injury, but goes on his errand to the king. See what some men can do by threats, and carrying things with a high hand.

2. By his insolent message (for I can call it no better) to the king, he recovered his place at court, to see the king's face, which

which is the periphrasis of a privy counsellor, *Esth.* i. 14. 1. His message was haughty and imperious, and very unbecoming either a son or a subject, *ver.* 32. He undervalued, the favour that had been shewed him, in recalling him from banishment, and restoring him to his own house; and that in Jerusalem; *wherefore am I come from Geshur?* He denies his own crimes, though most notorious, and will not own that there was any iniquity in him, insinuating, that therefore he had been wronged in the rebuke he had been under. He defies the king's justice, let him kill me, if he can find in his heart, knowing he loved him too well to do it.

(2.) Yet with this message he carried his point, *ver.* 33. David's strong affection for him, construed all this to be the language of a great respect for his father, and an earnest desire of his favour, when, alas, it was nothing less. See how easily wise and good men may be imposed upon by their own children that design ill, especially when they are blindly fond of them. Absalom, by a low congee, testified his submission to his father, *he bowed himself on his face to the ground*; and David, with a kiss, sealed his pardon. Did the bowels of a father prevail to reconcile him to an impenitent son, and shall penitent sinners question the compassions of him who is the Father of mercy? If Ephraim bemoan himself, God soon bemoans him, with all the kind expressions of a fatherly tenderness, *he is a dear son, and a pleasant child*, *Jer.* xxxi. 20.

C H A P. XV.

*Absalom's name signifies the peace of his father, yet he proves his greatest trouble, so oft are we disappointed in our expectations from the creature. The sword entailed upon David's house had hitherto been among his children, but now it begins to be drawn against himself, with this aggravation, that he may thank himself for it, for had he done justice upon the murderer he had prevented the Traitor. The story of Absalom's rebellion begins with this chapter, but we must go over three or four more before we see the end of it. In this chapter we have, (1.) The arts Absalom used to insinuate himself into the peoples affection, *ver.* 1,---6. (2.) His open avowing his pretensions to the crown at Hebron, whither he went under colour of a vote, and the strong party that appeared for him there, *ver.* 7,---12. (3.) The notice brought of this to David, and his flight from Jerusalem thereupon, *ver.* 13,---18. In his flight we are told, 1. What passed between him and Ittai, *ver.* 19,---22. 2. The concern of the country for him, *ver.* 23. 3. His conference with Zadock, *ver.* 24,---29. 4. His tears and prayers on this occasion, *ver.* 30, 31. 5. Matters concerted by him with Hushai, *ver.* 32,---37. Now the sword of God was fulfilled, that he would raise up evil against him out of his own house, *chap.* xii. 10.*

1. **A**ND it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots, and horses, and fifty men to run before him. 2. And Absalom rose up early, and stood by the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. 3. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right, but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. 4. Absalom said moreover, O that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice. 5. And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obedience, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. 6. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

Absalom is no sooner restored to his place at court, but he aims to be in the throne. He that was unhumiliated under his troubles, became insufferably proud when they were over; and he cannot be content with the honour of being the king's son, and the prospect of being his successor, but he must be king now. His mother was a king's daughter, on that, perhaps, he valued himself, and despised his father, who was but the son of Jesse. She was the daughter of a heathen king, which made him the less concerned for the peace of Israel: And David in this unhappy issue of that marriage, smarted for his being unequally yoked with an unbeliever.

When Absalom was restored to the king's favour, if he had had any sense of gratitude, he would have studied how to oblige his father, and make him easy, but, quite contrary, he meditates how to undermine him, by stealing the hearts of the people from him. Two things recommend a man to popular esteem: greatness and goodness.

1. Absalom looks great, *ver.* 1. He had learned of the king of Geshur, what was not allowed to the kings of Israel, to multiply horses; which make him look desirable, while his father on his mule looks despicable. The people desired a king like the nations, and such a one Absalom will be, appearing in pomp and magnificence, above what had been seen in Jerusalem. Samuel had foretold that this would be *the manner of the king*, he shall have chariots and horsemen, and some shall run before his chariots, *1 Sam.* viii. 11. and this is Absalom's manner. Fifty foot-men (in rich liveries we may suppose) running before him, to give notice of his approach, would highly gratify his pride, and the peoples foolish fancy. David thinks it is designed only to grace his court, and connives at it. Those parents know not what they do, who indulge a proud humour in their children, for I have seen more young people ruined by pride, than by any one lust whatsoever.

2. Absalom will seem very good too, but with a very bad design. Had he approved himself a good son, and a good subject, and set himself to serve his father's interest, he had done his present duty, and shewed himself worthy of future honours after his father's death: Those that know how to obey well, know how to rule: But to shew how good a judge and how good a king he will be, is but to deceive himself and others. Those are good indeed, that are good in their own place, not that pretend how good they will be in other peoples places: But this is all the goodness we find in Absalom.

1. He wisheth that he were a judge in Israel, *ver.* 4. he had all the pomp and all the pleasure he could wish, lived as great and as easy as any man could, yet this will not content him, unless he have power too, *O I that were a judge in Israel!* He that should himself have been judged to death for murder, has the impudence to aim at being a judge of others: We read not of Absalom's wisdom, virtue, or learning in the laws, nor had he given any proofs of his love to justice; but the contrary, yet he wishes he were a judge. Note, Those are commonly most ambitious of preferment, that are least fit for it, the best qualified are the most modest and self-diffident; while it is no better than the spirit of an Absalom, that saith, *O that I were a judge in Israel.*

2. He takes a very ill course to compass his wish. Had he humbly petitioned his father to employ him in the administration of justice, and studied to qualify himself for it, (according to the rule, *Exod.* xviii. 21.) no doubt he had been sure of the next judge's place that fell: but that is too mean a post for his proud spirit: It is below him to be subordinate, though to the king his father; he must be supreme or nothing: And such a judge as that, every man that has any cause might come to him: in all causes, and over all persons he must preside: little thinking what a fatigue this would be, to have every man come to him: Moses himself could not bear it. Those know not what power is, that grasp at so much, so very much.

To gain the power he aims at, he endeavours to instil into the peoples minds,

1. An ill opinion of the present administration, as if the affairs of the kingdom were altogether neglected, and no care taken about them. He picked up all he could that had business at the council board, enquired what their business was, and, 1. Upon a slight and general enquiry into their cause, he pronounced it good; *thy matters are right.* A fit man indeed to be a judge, who would give judgment upon hearing one side only! For he has a bad cause indeed, that cannot put a good colour upon it, when he himself has the telling of the story. But, 2. He told them it was to no purpose to appeal to the throne, *For there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee.* The king is himself old and past business, or so taken up with his devotions that he never minds business; his sons were so addicted to their pleasures, that though they had the name of chief rulers, they took no care of the affairs committed to them; he further seems to insinuate, what a great loss there was of him, while he was banished and confined, and how much the publick suffered by it; what his father said truly in Saul's reign, *Psalms* lxxv. 3. he saith *falsely*, the land and all the inhabitants of it are dissolved, all will go to wrack and ruin, unless I bear up the pillars of it. Every appellant shall be made to believe that he will never have justice done him, unless Absalom be vice-roy, or lord justice. It is the way of turbulent factious aspiring men, to reproach the government they are under, *Presumptuous are they, self-willed, and not afraid to speak evil of dignities*, *2 Pet.* ii. 10. Even David himself, the best of kings, and his administration could not escape the worst of censures. They that aim to usurp, cry out of grievances, and pretend to design nothing else but the redress of them: As Absalom here.

2. A good opinion of his own fitness to rule. That the people might say, *O that Absalom were a judge* (and they are apt enough to desire changes) he recommends himself to them, 1. As very diligent, he rose up early, and appeared in publick before the rest of the king's sons were stirring, and he stood beside the way of the gate,

gate, where the courts of judgment sat, as one mightily concerned to see justice done, and publick business dispatched. 2. As very inquisitive and prying, and desirous to be acquainted with every one's case. He would know of what city every one was that came for judgment, that he might inform himself concerning every part of the kingdom, and the state of it, *ver.* 2. 3. As very familiar and humble: If any Israelite offered to do obedience to him, he took him and embraced him as a friend, hugged him, and kissed him. No man's carriage could be more condescending, while his heart was as proud as Lucifer's. Ambitious projects are oft carried on by a *shew of humility*, Col. ii. 23. He knew what a grace it puts upon greatness to be affable and courteous, and how much it wins upon common people: had he been sincere in it, it had been his praise, but to fawn upon people, that he might betray them, was abominable hypocrisy. *He croucheth and humbleth himself to draw them into his net*, Psalm x. 9, 10.

7. ¶ And it came to pass after forty years, that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the LORD, in Hebron. 8. For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the LORD shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD. 9. And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose and went to Hebron. 10. ¶ But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron. 11. And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, *that were* called, and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing. 12. And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, *even* from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices: and the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom.

We have here the breaking out of Absalom's rebellion, which he had long been contriving. It is said to be after forty years, *ver.* 7. But whence that is to be dated, we are not told, not from David's beginning his reign, for then it would fall in the last year of his life, which is not probable, but either from his first anointing by Samuel seven years before, or rather (I think) from the people desiring a king, and the first change of the government into a monarchy; which might be about ten years before David began to reign; and it is fitly dated from thence, to shew that the same restless spirit was still working, and still they were given to change: As fond now of a new man, as then of a new model. So it fell about the thirtieth year of David's reign, Absalom's plot being now ripe for execution.

1. The place he chose for the rendezvous of his party, was Hebron; the place where he was born, and where his father began his reign, and continued it several years, which would give some advantage to his pretensions. Every one knew Hebron to be a royal city; and it lay in the heart of Judah's lot, in which tribe, probably, he thought his interest strong.

2. The pretence he had both to go thither, and to invite his friends to him there, was to offer a sacrifice to God, in performance of a vow he had made during his banishment, *ver.* 7, 8. We have cause enough to suspect, that he had not made any such vow, it doth not appear that he was so religiously inclined; but he that stuck not at murder and treason, would not make conscience of a lie to serve his purpose: If he said he had made such a vow, no body could disprove him. Under this pretence,

(1.) He got leave of his father to go to Hebron. He would be well pleased to hear, that his son in his exile was so desirous to return to Jerusalem, not only his father's city, but the city of the living God; that he looked up unto God to bring him back; that he had vowed, if he were brought back to serve the Lord, whose service he had hitherto neglected; and, that now he was brought back, he remembered his vow, and resolved to perform it: And if he think fit to do it in Hebron, rather than in Sion or Gibeon, the good king is so well pleased with the thing it self, that he will not object against his choice of the place; see how willing tender parents are to believe the best concerning their children, and upon the least indication of good to hope, even concerning those that have been untoward, that they will repent and reform. But how easy is it for children to take advantage of their good parents credulity, and to impose upon them with the shews of religion, while still they are what they were! David was over-joyed to hear that Absalom inclined to *serve the Lord*, and therefore readily gave him leave to go to Hebron, and to go thither with solemnity.

(2.) He got a good number of sober substantial citizens to go along with him, *ver.* 11. There went two hundred men, probably of the principal men of Jerusalem, whom he invited to join with him in his feast upon his sacrifice, and they went in their simplicity, not in the least suspecting that Absalom had any ill de-

sign in this journey. He knew it was to no purpose to tempt them into his plot, they were inviolably firm to David, but he drew them in to accompany him, that the common people might think they were in his interest, and that David was deserted by some of his best friends. Note, It is no new thing for very good men, and very good things to be made use of by designing men, to put a colour upon ill practices. When religion is made a stalking-horse, and sacrifice a shooing-horn to sedition and usurpation, it is not to be wondered at, if some that are well-affected to religion as these followers of Absalom here, are imposed upon by the fallacy, and drawn in to give countenance to that, with their names, which in their heart they abhor, not having known the depths of Satan.

3. The project he laid was to get himself proclaimed king throughout all the tribes of Israel, upon a signal given, *ver.* 10. Spies were sent abroad to be ready in every country to receive the notice with satisfaction and acclamations of joy, and to make the people believe, that the news was both very true and very good, and that they were all concerned to take up arms for their new king. Upon the sudden spreading of this proclamation, *Absalom reigns in Hebron*, some would conclude David was dead, others that he had resigned, and by this means, they that were in the secret would draw in many to appear for Absalom, and come in to his assistance, that if they had rightly understood the matter, would have abhorred the thought of it, but being drawn in would stick to him. See what artifices ambitious men use for the compassing of their ends, and in matters of state, as well as in matters of religion, let us not be forward to believe every spirit, but try the spirits.

4. The person he especially courted and relied upon in this affair was Ahithophel, a politick thinking man, and one that had a clear head, and a great compass of thought, that had been David's counsellor, (his guide and his acquaintance, *Psalm* lv. 13. *his familiar friend in whom he trusted, which did eat of his bread*, *Psalm* xli. 9.) But upon some disgust of David's against him, or his against David, was banished, or retired from publick business, and lived privately in the country. How should a man of such good principles as David, and such corrupt principles as Ahithophel long agree? A fitter tool Absalom could not find in all the kingdom, than one that was so great a statesman, and yet was disaffected to the present ministry: While Absalom was offering his sacrifices in performance of his pretended vow, he sent for this man. So much was his heart upon the projects of his ambition, that he could not stay to make an end of his devotion; which shewed what his eye was upon in all, and that it was but for a pretence that he made long offerings.

5. The party that joined with him, proved at last very considerable. The people increased continually with Absalom, which made the conspiracy strong and formidable. Every one whom he had complemented and caressed, and pronounced his matters right and good, (especially, if afterwards the cause went against him,) not only came himself, but made all the interest he could for him, so that he wanted not for numbers. The majority is no certain rule to judge of equity by. *All the world wandered after the beast*. Whether Absalom formed this design purely in the height of his ambition, and fondness to rule, or whether there were not in it also malice again his father, and revenge for his banishment and confinement, though it was so much less than he deserved, doth not appear: But generally that which aims at the crown, aims at the head that wears it.

13. ¶ And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom. 14. And David said unto all his servants that *were* with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not *else* escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword. 15. And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants *are ready to do* whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint. 16. And the king went forth, and all his household after him: and the king left ten women, *which were* concubines, to keep the house. 17. And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off. 18. And all his servants passed on beside him; and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king. 19. ¶ Then said the king to Ittai, the Gittite, Wherefore goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king: for thou *art* a stranger, and also an exile. 20. Whereas thou camest *but* yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth *be* with thee. 21. And Ittai answered the king, and said, *As the* LORD

LORD liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be. 22. And David said to Ittai, Go, and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and all the little ones that were with him. 23. And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness.

Here is, 1. The notice brought to David of Absalom's rebellion, ver. 13. The matter was bad enough, and yet it seems to have been made worse to him (as such things commonly are) than really it was; for he was told, that *the hearts of the men of Israel*, (i. e. the generality of them, at least the leading men) were after Absalom. But David was the more apt to believe it, because now he could call to mind the arts Absalom had used to inveigle them, and, perhaps, reflected upon it with regret, that he had not done more to counterwork him, and secure his own interest, which he had been too confident of. Note, It is the wisdom of princes, to make sure the hearts of their subjects, for if they have them, they have their purses and arms, and all, at their service.

2. The alarm this gave to David, and the resolutions he came to thereupon. We may well imagine him, in a manner, thunder-struck, when he heard that the son he loved so dearly, and had been so indulgent to, was so unnaturally, and ungratefully, in arms against him. Well might he say with Cæsar, *Kai o teknon; What thou my son?* Let not parents raise their hopes too high from their children, lest they be disappointed. David did not call a council, but, consulting only with God and his own heart, determined immediately to quit Jerusalem, ver. 14. He took up this strange resolve, so disagreeable to his character as a man of courage, either, 1. As a penitent, submitting to the rod, and lying down under God's correcting hand. Conscience now minded him of his sin in the matter of Uriah, and the sentence he was under for it, which was, that *evil should rise against him out of his own house*; now, thinks he, the word of God begins to be fulfilled, and it is not for me to contend with it, or fight against it; God is righteous, and I submit. Before unrighteous Absalom he could justify himself, and stand it out, but before the righteous God he must condemn himself, and yield to his judgments. Thus he *accepts the punishment of his iniquity*. Or, 2. As a politician. Jerusalem was a great city, but not tenable, it should seem, by David's prayer, Psalm li. 18. that the walls of it were not built up, much less was it regularly fortified: it was quite too big to be garrisoned by so small a force as David had now with him: he had reason to fear the generality of the inhabitants were too well affected to Absalom, to be true to him: should he fortify himself there, he might lose the country, in which, especially among those that lay furthest from Absalom's tampering, he hoped to have the most friends. And he had such a kindness for Jerusalem, that he was loth to make that the seat of war, and expose it to the calamities of a siege, but will rather quit it tamely to the rebels. Note, Good men, when they suffer themselves, care not how few are involved with them in suffering.

3. His hasty flight from Jerusalem. His servants agreed to the measures he took, and faithfully adhered to him, ver. 15. and assured him of their inviolable allegiance. Whereupon, 1. He went out of Jerusalem himself on foot, while his son Absalom had chariots and horses. It is not always the best man, nor the best cause, that makes the best figure. See here, not only the servant, but the traitor, on horseback, while the prince, the rightful prince, walks as a servant upon the earth, Eccl. x. 7. Thus he chose to do, to abase himself so much the more under God's hand, and in condescension to his friends and followers, with whom he would foot it, in token that he would live and die with them. 2. He took his household with him, his wives and children, that he might protect them in this day of danger, and they be a comfort to him in this day of grief. Masters of families, in their greatest frights, must not neglect their households. *Ten women*, that were concubines, he left behind to keep the house, thinking, the weakness of their sex would secure them from murder, and their age and relation to him, would secure them from rape, but God over-ruled this for the fulfilling of his word. 3. He took his life-guard with him, or band of pensioners; the Cherethites and Pelethites, who were under the command of Benaiah; and the Gittites, who were under the command of Ittai, ver. 18. These Gittites seem to have been, by birth, Philistines of Gath, who came, a regiment of them, six hundred in all, to enter themselves in David's service, having known him at Gath, and being greatly in love with him for his virtue and piety, and having embraced the Jews religion. David made them of his *guards du corps*, his immediate attendants, and those stuck to him in his distress. The son of David found not so great faith in Israel, as in a Roman centurion, and a woman of Canaan. 4. As many as would of the people of Jerusalem he took with him, and made a halt, at some distance

from the city, to draw them up, ver. 17. He compelled none; they whose hearts were with Absalom, to Absalom let them go, and so shall their doom be, they will soon have enough of him. Christ lifts none but volunteers.

4. His discourse with Ittai the Gittite, who commanded the Philistine profelytes. 1. David dissuaded him from going along with him, ver. 19, 20. Though he and his men might be greatly serviceable to him, yet, (1.) He would try whether he were hearty for him, and not inclined to Absalom: he therefore bids him return to his post in Jerusalem, and serve the new king. If he were no more but a soldier of fortune (as we say) he would be for that side which would pay and prefer him best; and to that side let him go. (2.) If he were faithful to David, yet he would not have him exposed to the fatigues and perils he now counted upon. David's tender spirit cannot bear to think that a stranger and an exile, a profelyte, and a new convert, who ought, by all means possible, to be encouraged and made easy, should, at his first coming, meet with such hard usage. *Should I make thee go up and down with us?* No, return with thy brethren. Generous souls are more concerned at the share others have in their troubles, than at their own. Ittai shall therefore be dismissed with a blessing, *Mercy and truth be with thee*, i. e. God's mercy and truth, mercy according to promise, the promise made to those who renounced other gods, and put themselves under the wings of the divine Majesty. This is a very proper pious farewell, when we part with a friend, *Mercy and truth be with thee*, and then thou art safe, and mayest be easy wherever thou art. David's dependence was upon the mercy and truth of God for comfort and happiness, both for himself and his friends: see Psalm lxi. 7. 2. Ittai bravely resolves not to leave him, ver. 21. where David is, *whether in life or death*, safe or in peril, there will this faithful friend of his be: and he confirms his resolution with an oath, that he might not be tempted to break it: such a value has he for David, not for the sake of his wealth and greatness, for then he would have deserted him, now he saw him thus reduced; but for the sake of his wisdom and goodness, which were still the same, that, whatever comes of it, he will never leave him. Note, That is a friend indeed, who loves at all times, and will stick to us in adversity. Thus should we cleave to the son of David, with full purpose of heart, that *neither life nor death shall separate us from his love*.

5. The common people's sympathy with David in his affliction. When he and his attendants passed over the brook Kidron (the very same brook that Christ passed over, when he entered upon his sufferings, John xviii. 1.) toward the way of the wilderness, which lay between Jerusalem and Jericho, all the country wept with a loud voice, ver. 23. Cause enough there was for weeping; 1. To see a prince thus reduced; one that had lived so great, forced from his palace, and in fear of his life, with a small retinue, seeking shelter in a desert: the city of David, which he himself won, built and fortified, made too hot for David himself; it would move the compassion, even of strangers, to see a man fallen thus low from such a height, and this by the wickedness of his own son; a piteous case it was. Parents that are abused and ruined by their own children, merit the tender sympathy of their friends, as much as any of the sons or daughters of affliction. Especially, 2. To see their own prince thus wronged, who had been so great a blessing to their land, and had not done any thing to forfeit the affections of his people; to see him in this distress, and themselves unable to help him, might well draw floods of tears from their eyes.

24. ¶ And lo, Zadok also, and all the Levites were with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God, and they set down the ark of God; and Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city. 25. And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation. 26. But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee: behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him. 27. The king said also unto Zadok the priest, Art not thou a seer? return into the city in peace, and your two sons with you. Ahimaaz thy son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar, 28. See, I will tarry in the plain of the wilderness, until there come word from you to certify me. 29. Zadok therefore and Abiathar carried the ark of God again to Jerusalem, and they tarried there. 30. ¶ And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went bare-foot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up.

Here is, 1. The fidelity of the priests and Levites, and their firm adherence to David and his interest. They knew David's great affection

affection to them and their office, notwithstanding his failings; the method Absalom took to gain peoples affections made no impression upon them: he had little religion in him, and therefore they readily stuck to David; Zadok and Abiathar, and all the Levites, if he go, will accompany him, and take the ark with them, that by it they might ask counsel of God for him, *ver. 24.* Note, They that are friends to the ark in their prosperity, shall find it a friend to them in their adversity. Formerly David would not rest, till he had found a resting place for the ark, and now, if the priests may have their mind, the ark shall not rest till David returns to his rest.

2. David's dismissal of them back into the city, *ver. 25, 26.* Abiathar was high priest, *1 Kings ii. 35.* but Zadok was his assistant, and attended the ark most closely, while Abiathar was active in publick business, *ver. 24.* Therefore David directs his speech to Zadok, and an excellent speech it is, and shews him to be in a very good frame under his affliction, and that still he holds fast his integrity.

(1.) He is very solicitous for the safety of the ark; by all means, carry that back into the city, let not that be unsettled and exposed with me, lodge that again in the tent pitched for it; sure Absalom, as bad as he is, will do that no harm. David's heart, like Eli's, trembles for the ark of God. Note, It argues a good principle to be more concerned for the church's prosperity, than for our own, to prefer Jerusalem before our chief joy, *Psal. cxxxvii. 6.* the success of the gospel, and the flourishing of the church, above our own wealth, credit, ease and safety, even when they are most in hazard.

(2.) He is very desirous to return to the enjoyment of the privileges of God's house. He will reckon it the greatest instance of God's favour to him, if he may but once more be brought back to see it, and his habitation, this will be more his joy, than to be brought back to his own palace and throne again. Note, Gracious souls measure their comforts and conveniences in this world, by the opportunity they give them of communion with God. Hezekiah wishes for the recovery of his health for this reason, that he might go up to the house of the Lord, *Isa. xxxviii. 22.*

(3.) He is very submissive to the holy will of God, concerning the issue of his present dark dispensation. He hopes the best, *ver. 25.* and hopes for it from the favour of God, which he looks upon to be the fountain of all good, if God favour me so far, I shall be settled again as formerly: but he provides for the worst. If he deny me this favour, if he thus say, *I have no delight in thee,* I know I deserve the continuance of his displeasure, his holy will be done; see him here waiting to receive the event: *Behold, here am I,* as a servant expecting orders; and see him willing to refer himself to God concerning it, *let him do to me as seemeth good to him,* I have nothing to object, all is well that God doth. Observe with what satisfaction and holy complacency he speaks of the divine disposal: not only he can do what he will, subscribing to his power, *Job ix. 12.* or, he may do what he will, subscribing to his sovereignty, *Job xxxiii. 13.* or, he will do what he will, subscribing to his unchangeableness, *Job xxiii. 13, 15,* but, *let him do what he will,* subscribing to his wisdom and goodness. Note, It is our interest, as well as duty, cheerfully to acquiesce in the will of God, whatever befalls us. That we may not complain of what is, let us see God's hand in all events; and that we may not be afraid of what shall be, let us see all events in God's hands.

3. The confidence David put in the priests, to serve his interest, to the utmost of their power, in his absence. He calls Zadok a seer, *ver. 27.* i. e. a wise man, a man that can see into business, and discern time and judgment; thou hast thy eyes in thy head, *Eccl. ii. 14.* and therefore art capable of doing me service, especially, by sending me intelligence of the enemies motions and resolutions. One friend that is a seer, in such an exigence as this, was worth twenty that were not so quick-sighted. For the settling of a private correspondence with the priests in his absence, he appoints, 1. Whom they should send to him, their two sons Ahimaaz and Jonathan, whose coat, it might be hoped, would be their protection, and of whose prudence and faithfulness, probably, he had had experience. 2. Whither they should send. He would encamp in the plain of the wilderness, till he heard from them, *ver. 28.* and then would move according to the information and advice they should send him. Hereupon they returned to the city to wait the event, it was pity any disturbance should be given to a state so happy as this was, when the prince and the priests had such an entire affection for, and confidence in, each other.

4. The melancholy posture that David and his men put themselves into, when, in the beginning of their march, they went up the mount of Olives, *ver. 30.* 1. David himself, as a deep mourner, covered his head and face for shame and blushing, went barefoot, as a prisoner or slave, and for mortification, and went weeping. Did it become a man of his reputation, for courage and greatness of spirit, thus to cry like a child, only for fear of an enemy at a distance, against whom he might easily have made head, and, perhaps, with one bold stroke have routed him? Yes, it did not ill become him, considering how much there was in this trouble, (1.) Of the unkindness of his son. He could not but weep, to think that one who came out of his bowels, and had so oft lain

in his arms, should thus lift up the heel against him. God himself is said to be grieved with the rebellions of his own children, *Psal. xcv. 10.* and even broken with their whorish heart, *Ezek. vi. 9.* (2.) There was much of the displeasure of his God in it; this infused the wormwood and gall into the affliction and misery, *Lam. iii. 19.* His sin was ever before him, *Psal. li. 3.* but never so plain, nor ever appearing so black as now. He never wept thus when Saul hunted him, but a wounded conscience makes trouble lie heavy, *Psal. xxxviii. 4.* 2. When David wept, all his company wept likewise, being much affected with his grief, and willing to share in it. It is our duty to weep with those that weep, especially our superiors, and those that are better than we; for, if this be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? We must weep with those that weep for sin. When Hezekiah humbled himself for his sin, all Jerusalem joined with him, *2 Chron. xxxii. 26.* To prevent suffering with sinners, let us sorrow with them.

31. ¶ And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. 32. ¶ And it came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him, with his coat rent, and earth upon his head: 33. Unto whom David said, If thou passest on with me, then thou shalt be a burden unto me. 34. But if thou return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be thy servant, O king, as I have been thy fathers servant hitherto, so will I now also be thy servant: then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. 35. And hast thou not there with thee Zadok and Abiathar the priests? therefore it shall be, that what thing soever thou shalt hear out of the kings house, thou shalt tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. 36. Behold, they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz Zadoks son, and Jonathan Abiathars son: and by them ye shall send unto me every thing that ye can hear. 37. So Hushai Davids friend came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem.

Nothing, it seems, appeared to David more threatening in Absalom's plot, than that Ahithophel was in it, for one good head, in such a design, is worth a thousand good hands. Absalom was himself no politician, but he had got one intirely in his interest that was, and would be the more dangerous, because he had been all along acquainted with David's counsels and affairs; if therefore he can be baffled, Absalom is as good as routed, and the head of the conspiracy cut off. This David endeavours to do,

1. By prayer. When he heard that Ahithophel was in the plot, he lift up his heart to God, in this short prayer. *Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness,* *ver. 31.* He had not opportunity for a long prayer, but he was none of those that thought he should be heard for his much speaking. It was a fervent prayer, *Lord, I pray thee,* do this. God is well pleased with the importunity of those that come to him with their petitions. He was particular in this prayer; names the person whose counsels he prays against. God gives us leave in prayer to be humbly and reverently free with him, and to mention the particular care, and fear, and grief, that lies heavy upon us. He prays not against Ahithophel's person, but against his counsel, that God would turn it into foolishness; that, though he was a wise man, he might, at this time, give foolish counsel; or, if he gave wise counsel, that it might be rejected as foolish; or, if it were followed, that, by some providence or other, it might be defeated, and not attain the end. David prayed this in a firm belief that God has all hearts in his hand, and tongues too; that, when he pleaseth, he can take away the understanding of the aged, and make the judges fools, *Job. xii. 17.* *Isa. iii. 2, 3.* and in hope that God would own and plead his just and injured cause. Note, We may pray in faith, and should pray with fervency, that God will turn that counsel into foolishness, which is taken against his people.

2. By policy. We must second our prayer with our endeavours, else we tempt God. It is good service to countermine the politicks of the church's enemies. When David came to the top of the mount, he worshipped God, *ver. 32.* Note, Weeping must not hinder worshipping, but quicken it rather. Now he penned the third Psalm, as appears by the title, and some think his singing it was the worship he now paid to God. Just now providence brought Hushai to him; while he was yet speaking God heard, and sent him the person that should be instrumental to beset Ahithophel. He came to condole David's present trouble, with his coat rent, and earth upon his head; but David having a great deal of confidence in his conduct and faithfulness, resolved to employ him in the nature of a spy upon Absalom: he would not take him with him, *ver. 33.* for he had now more need of soldiers than counsellors, but sent him back to Jerusalem to wait for Absalom's arrival,

arrival, as a deserter from David, and to offer him his service, *ver.* 34. Thus he might insinuate himself into his counsels, and defeat Ahithophel, either by dissuading Absalom from following his advice, or by discovering it to David, that he might know where to stand upon his guard. How this gross dissimulation, which David put Hushai upon, can be justified as a stratagem in war, I do not see. The best that can be made of it is, that Absalom, if he rebel against his father, must stand upon his guard against all mankind; and if he will be deceived, let him be deceived. David recommends him to Zadok and Abiathar, as persons proper to be consulted with, *ver.* 35. and to their two sons, as trusty men to be sent on errands to David, *ver.* 36. And Hushai, thus instructed, came to Jerusalem, *ver.* 37. whither also Absalom soon after came with his forces. How soon do royal palaces and royal cities change their masters! But we look for a kingdom which cannot be thus shaken, and in the possession of which we cannot be disturbed.

C H A P. XVI.

In the close of the foregoing chapter we left David flying from Jerusalem, and Absalom entering into it; in this chapter, 1. We are to follow David in his melancholy flight, and there we find him, (1.) Cheated by Ziba, ver. 1,---4. (2.) Cursed by Shimei, which he bears with wonderful patience, ver. 5,---14. 2. We are to meet Absalom in his triumphant entry; and there we find him, (1.) Cheated by Hushai, ver. 15,---19. (2.) Counsell'd by Ahithophel to go in unto his father's concubines, ver. 20,---23.

1. **A**N D when David was a little past the top of the hill, behold, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer-fruits, and a bottle of wine. 2. And the king said unto Ziba, What meanest thou by these? And Ziba said, The asses be for the king's household to ride on, and the bread and summer-fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine, that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink. 3. And the king said, And where is thy master's son? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem: for he said, To day shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father. 4. Then said the king to Ziba, Behold, thine are all that pertained unto Mephibosheth. And Ziba said, I humbly beseech thee that I may find grace in thy sight, my lord O king.

We read before how kind David was to Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, how he prudently intrusted his servant Ziba with the management of his estate, while he generously entertained him at his own table, *chap.* ix. 10. This matter was well settled; but, it seems, Ziba is not content to be manager, he longs to be master of Mephibosheth's estate. Now he thinks it his time to make himself so; if he can procure a grant of it from the crown, he hopes, whether David or Absalom get the better, it is all one to him, he shall secure his prey, which he promiseth himself by fishing in troubled waters. In order hereunto,

1. He makes David a handsome present of provisions, which was the more welcome, because it came seasonably, *ver.* 1. and with this he designed to incline him to himself, for a man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men, *Prov.* xviii. 16. Nay, *Whithersoever it turneth it prospereth*, *Prov.* xvii. 8. David inferred from this, that Ziba was a very discreet and generous man, and well affected to him, when in all he designed nothing but to make his own markets; and to get Mephibosheth's estate settled upon him. Shall the prospect of advantage in this world make men generous to the rich, and shall not the believing of an abundant recompence in the resurrection of the just, make us charitable to the poor? *Luke* xiv. 14. Ziba was very considerate in the present he brought to David, it was what would do him some good in his present distress, *ver.* 2. Observe, the wine is intended for those that were faint, not for the king's own drinking, or the courtiers, it seems they did not commonly use it, but it was for cordials, for them that were ready to perish, *Prov.* xxxi. 6. Blessed art thou, O land, when thy princes use wine for strength, as David did, and not for drunkenness, as Absalom did, *chap.* xiii. 28. See *Eccl.* x. 17. Whatever Ziba intended in this present, God's providence sent it in to David for his support very graciously. God makes use of bad men for good purposes to his people; and sends them meat by ravens.

2. Having by his present insinuated himself into David's affection, and gained credit with him, the next thing he hath to do for the compassing of his end, is to incense him against Mephibosheth,

which he doth by a false accusation, representing him as ungratefully designing to raise himself by the present broils, and to recover the crown to his own head, now David and his son were contending for it. David enquires for him, as one of his family, which gives Ziba occasion to tell this false story of him, *ver.* 3. What a great deal of damage do masters many times sustain by the lying tongues of their servants? David knew Mephibosheth not to be an ambitious man, but easy in his place; and well affected to him and his government; nor could he be so weak as to expect with his lame legs to climb the ladder of preferment; yet he gives credit to the calumny, and without further enquiry or consideration, convicts Mephibosheth of treason, seizeth his lands as forfeited, and grants them to Ziba; *Behold, thine are all that pertained to Mephibosheth*, *ver.* 4. a rash judgment, and which afterwards he was ashamed of, when the truth came to light, *chap.* xix. 29. Princes cannot help it, but they will be sometimes (as our law speaks) deceived in their grants; but they ought to use all means possible to discover the truth, and to guard against malicious designing men, who would impose upon them, as Ziba did upon David, who, having by his wiles gained his point, laughed in his sleeve at the king's great easiness, hugged himself in his own success, and parted with a mighty compliment upon the king, that he valued his favour more than Mephibosheth's estate, let me find grace in thy sight, O king, and I have enough. Great men ought always to be jealous of flatterers, and remember that nature has given them two ears, that they may hear both sides.

5. ¶ And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came. 6. And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people, and all the mighty men were on his right hand, and on his left. 7. And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial. 8. The LORD hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned, and the LORD hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man. 9. ¶ Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head. 10. And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the LORD hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so? 11. And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse: for the LORD hath bidden him. 12. It may be that the LORD will look on mine affliction, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day. 13. And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hills side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust. 14. And the king, and all the people that were with him, came weary, and refreshed themselves there.

We here find how David bore Shimei's curses much better than he had born Ziba's flatteries; by those he was brought to pass a wrong judgment upon another, by these to pass a right judgment on himself; the world's smiles are more dangerous than its frowns. Observe here,

1. How insolent and furious Shimei was, and how his malice took occasion from David's present distress to be so much the more outrageous: David in his flight was come to Bahurim a city of Benjamin, in or near which this Shimei lived, who being of the house of Saul (with the fall of which all his hopes of preferment fell) had an implacable enmity to David, unjustly looking upon him as the ruin of Saul and his family, only because by the divine appointment he succeeded it. While David was in prosperity and power Shimei hated him as much as he did now, but durst not then say any thing against him; God knows what is in the hearts of those that are disaffected to him and his government, earthly princes do not; but now he came forth and cursed David with all the ill words and ill wishes he could invent, *ver.* 5. He took this opportunity to give vent to his malice. 1. Because now he thought he might do it safely; yet if David had now given the provocation its just resentment, it had cost him his life. 2. Because now it would be most grievous to David, would add affliction to his grief, and pour vinegar into his wounds. He complains of them as most

barbarous, who talk to the grief of those whom God has wounded, Psalm lxxix. 26. so Shimei did, loading him with curses, whom no generous eye could look upon without compassion. 3. Because now he thought providence justified his reproaches, and his present affliction proved him to be as ill a man as he was willing to represent him. Job's friends condemned him upon this false principle. They that are under the rebukes of a gracious God, must not think it strange if those bring upon them the reproaches of evil men. If once it be said, *God hath forsaken him*, presently it follows, *persecute and take him*, Psalm lxxxi. 11. But it is the character of a base spirit thus to trample upon those that are down, and insult over them.

See, 1. What this wretched fellow did: *He cast stones at David*, ver. 6. as if his king had been a dog, or the worst of criminals, whom all Israel must stone with stones till he die. Perhaps, he kept at such a distance, that the stones he threw could not reach David, nor any of his attendants, yet he shewed what he would have done if it had been in his power. *He cast dust*, ver. 13. which probably would blow into his own eyes, like the curses he threw, which, being causeless, would return upon his own head. Thus, while his malice made him odious, the impotency of it made him ridiculous and contemptible. They that fight against God, though they hate him, they cannot hurt him. *If thou sinnest what dost thou against him?* Job xxxv. vi.. It was an aggravation of his wickedness, that David was attended with his mighty men on his right hand and on his left, so that he was not in so forlorn a condition as he thought; *persecuted but not forsaken*: and that he continued to do it, and did it the more passionately; for David's bearing it patiently.

2. What he said. With the stones he shot his arrows, even bitter words, ver. 7, 8. in contempt of that law, *Thou shalt not curse the gods*, Exod. xxii. 28. David was a man of honour and conscience, and great reputation for every thing that is just and good; what could this foul mouth say against him? Why truly, what was done long since to the house of Saul, is the only thing that sticks upon his stomach, and with which he upbraids him, because that was the thing that he himself was a loser by. See how apt we are to judge of men and their character, by what they are to us: and to conclude that those are certainly evil men, that have never so justly been, or that we never so unjustly think, have been instruments of evil to us. So partial are we to our selves, that no rule can be more fallacious than this. No man could be more innocent of the blood of the house of Saul than David was: Once and again he spared Saul's life, while he sought his. When Saul and his sons were slain by the Philistines, David and his men were many miles off; and when they heard it lamented it. From the murder of Abner and Ishbosheth, he had sufficiently cleared himself; and yet all *the blood of the house of Saul* must be laid at his door, innocency is no fence against malice and falsehood; nor are we to think it strange if we be charged with that which we have been most careful to keep our selves from. It is well for us that men are not to be our judges, but he, whose judgment is according to truth.

The blood of the house of Saul is here most unjustly charged upon him, 1. As that which gave him his character, and denominated him a bloody man, and a man of Belial, ver. 7. And if a man of blood, no doubt a man of Belial, i. e. A child of the devil, (who is called Belial, 2 Cor. vi. 15.) and who was a murderer from the beginning. Bloody men are the worst of men. 2. As that which brought the present trouble upon him; now thou art dethroned and driven out to the wilderness, *the Lord has returned upon thee the blood of the house of Saul*. See how forward malicious men are to press God's judgments into the service of their own passion and revenge: If any they think has wronged them come into trouble, that must be made the cause of the trouble: But we must take heed, lest we wrong God by making his providence, thus to patronize our foolish and unjust resentments. As the *wrath of man works not the righteousness of God*, so the righteousness of God serveth not the wrath of man. 3. As that which would now be his utter ruin, for he endeavours to make him despair of ever recovering his throne again, (now they said, *there is no help for him in God*, Psal. iii. 2.) *the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom*, (not Mephibosheth, the house of Saul never dreamed of making him king, as Ziba suggested) *and thou art taken in thy mischief*, i. e. the mischief that will be thy destruction, and all, because thou art a bloody man. Thus Shimei cursed.

2. See how patient and submissive David was under this abuse. The sons of Zeruiah, Abishai particularly, were forward to maintain David's honour with their swords; they resent the affront heinously, as well they might; *why should this dead dog be suffered to curse the king?* ver. 9. If David will but give them leave, they will put these lying cursing lips to silence, and take off his head, for his throwing stones at the king was an overt act, which abundantly proved that he compassed and imagined his death. But the king would by no means suffer it, *what have I to do with you? so let him curse*. Thus Christ rebuked the disciples; who in zeal for his honour would have fire from heaven on the town that affronted him, Luke ix. 55. Let us see with what considerations David quieted himself.

1. The chief thing that silenced him was, that he had deserved it; this is not mentioned indeed; for a man may truly repent, and yet needs not upon all occasions proclaim his penitent reflections. Shimei unjustly upbraided him with the blood of Saul, from that his conscience acquitted him, but at the same time charged him with the blood of Uriah, the reproach is too true (thinks David) though false as he means it. Note, A humble tender spirit will turn reproaches into reproofs, and so get good by them, instead of being provoked by them.

2. He observes *the hand of God in it*; *the Lord hath said unto him, curse David*, ver. 10. and again, *so let him curse, for the Lord has bidden him*, ver. 11. As it was Shimei's sin, it was not from God, but from the devil, and his own wicked heart, nor did God's hand in it excuse or extenuate it, much less justify it, no more than it did their sin, who put Christ to death, Acts ii. 24. — iv. 28. But as it was David's affliction it was from the Lord, one of the evils which he raised up against him. David looked above the instrument of his trouble to the supreme director, as Job, when the rapparees had plundered him, acknowledges *the Lord has taken away*. Nothing more proper to quiet a gracious soul under affliction, than an eye to the hand of God in it, *I opened not my mouth because thou didst it*. The scourge of the tongue is God's rod.

3. He quiets himself under the lesser affliction, with the consideration of the greater, ver. 11. *My son seeks my life, much more may this Benjamite*. Note, Tribulation works patience in those that are sanctified. The more we bear, the better able we should be to bear still more; what tries our patience, should improve it. The more we are inured to trouble, the less we should be surprised at it, and not think it strange. Marvel not that enemies are injurious, when even friends are unkind; nor that friends are unkind, when even children are undutiful.

4. He comforts himself with hopes that God would some way or other bring good to him out of his affliction, would balance the trouble it self, and recompence his patience under it. *The Lord will requite me good for his cursing*. If God bid Shimei grieve me, it is, that he himself may the more sensibly comfort me; sure he has mercy in store for me, which he is preparing me for by this trial. We may depend upon God as our pay-master, not only for our services, but for our sufferings. *Let them curse, but bless thou*. David at length is housed at Bahurim, ver. 14. where he meets with refreshment, and is hid from this strife of tongues.

15. ¶ And Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him. 16. And it came to pass when Hushai the Archite, Davids friend, was come unto Absalom, that Hushai said unto Absalom, God save the king, God save the king. 17. And Absalom said to Hushai, Is this thy kindness to thy friend? why wentest thou not with thy friend? 18. And Hushai said unto Absalom, Nay, but whom the LORD and this people, and all the men of Israel choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide. 19. And again, whom should I serve? *should I not serve in the presence of his son?* as I have served in thy fathers presence, so will I be in thy presence. 20. ¶ Then said Absalom to Ahithophel, Give counsel among you what we shall do. 21. And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Go in unto thy fathers concubines, which he hath left to keep the house, and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father, then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong. 22. So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house, and Absalom went in unto his fathers concubines, in the sight of all Israel. 23. And the counsel of Ahithophel which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel, both with David and with Absalom.

Absalom had notice sent him presently by some of his friends at Jerusalem, that David was withdrawn, and in what posture, with what a small retinue he was gone: So that the coasts were clear, Absalom might take possession of Jerusalem when he pleased: The gates were open, and there were none to oppose him: Accordingly he came without delay, ver. 15. extremely elevated, no doubt, with this success at first, and that that in which, when he formed his design, probably, he apprehended the greatest difficulty, was so easily and effectually done: Now he is master of Jerusalem, he concludes all his own, the country will follow of course. God suffers wicked men to prosper a while in their wicked plots, even beyond their expectation, that their disappointment may be the more grievous and disgraceful.

The most celebrated politicians of that age, were Ahithophel and Hushai, the former Absalom brings with him to Jerusalem, ver. 15. the other meets him there, ver. 16. so that he cannot but think himself sure of success, when he has both these to be his counsellors;

counsellors; on them he relies, and consults not the ark, though he had that with him. But miserable counsellors were they both; for

1. Hushai would never counsel him to do wisely, he was really his enemy, and designed to betray him; while he pretended to be in his interest; so that he could not have a more dangerous man about him. 1. Hushai complemented him upon his accession to the throne, as if he were abundantly satisfied in his title, and well pleased that he was come to the possession, *ver. 16.* What arts of dissimulation are those tempted to use, who govern themselves by fleshly wisdom, and how happy are they, who have not known these depths of Satan, but have their conversation in the world with simplicity, and godly sincerity. 2. Absalom is surprized to find him for him, who was known to be David's intimate friend, and confident: He asks him, *is this thy kindness to thy friend?* *ver. 17.* pleasing himself with this thought, that all would be his since Hushai was: He doubts not of his sincerity, but easily believes what he gladly would have, that David's best friends were so in love with him, as to take the first opportunity to declare for him, *Though the pride of his heart deceived him,* *Obad. 3.* 3. Hushai still makes him believe he is hearty for him. For though David is his friend, yet he is for the king in possession, *ver. 18.* whom the people choose, and providence smiles upon he will be faithful to; and he is for the king in succession, *ver. 19.* the rising sun. It was true, he loved his father, but he had had his day, and it was over, and why should he not love his successor as well? Thus he pretends to give reasons for a resolution he abhorred the thought of.

2. Ahithophel did counsel him to do wickedly, and so did as effectually betray him, as he did, that was designedly false to him: For they that advise men to sin, certainly advise them to their hurt; and that government which is founded in sin is founded in the sand. It seems Ahithophel was noted for a deep politician, his counsel was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God, *ver. 23.* such reputation was he in for subtilty and sagacity in publick affairs, such reaches had he beyond other privy counsellors, such reasons would he give for his advice, and such success generally his projects had, that all people, good and bad, both David and Absalom had a mighty regard to his sentiments, too much by far, when they regarded him *as an oracle of God*; shall the prudence of any mortal compare with him, who is only wise? Let us observe from this account of Ahithophel's fame for policy, 1. That many excel in worldly wisdom, who are utterly destitute of heavenly grace, because those, who set up for oracles themselves, are apt to despise the oracles of God. *God has chosen the foolish things of the world*; and the greatest statesmen are seldom the greatest saints. 2. That many times the great politicians act most foolishly for themselves. Ahithophel is cried up for an oracle, and yet very unwisely takes part with Absalom, who was not only a usurper, but a shatter-brained young fellow, never like to come to good; whose fall, and the fall of all that adhered to him, any one with the tenth part of the policy that Ahithophel pretended to, might foresee. Well, after all, honesty is the best policy, and will be found so at long run.

Observe, 1. The wicked counsel Ahithophel gave to Absalom: finding that David had left his concubines to keep the house, he advised him to *lie with them*, *ver. 21.* a very wicked thing, the divine law had made it a capital crime, *Lev. xx. 11.* The apostle speaks of it as a piece of villainy, *not so much as named among the gentiles*, *1 Cor. v. 1.* Reuben lost his birthright for it. But Ahithophel advised to it as a politick thing, because it would give assurance to all Israel, 1. That he was in good earnest in his pretensions; no doubt he resolved to make himself master of all that belonged to his predecessor, when he began with his concubines. 2. That he was resolved never to make peace with his father upon any terms, for, by this, he would render himself odious to his father, that he would never be reconciled to him; which, perhaps, the people were jealous of, and that they must be sacrificed to the reconciliation. Having drawn the sword, he did by this provocation throw away the scabbard, which would strengthen the hands of his party, and keep them tight to him. This was his cursed policy, which spake him rather *an oracle of the devil, than of God.*

2. Absalom's compliance with this counsel. It suited his lewd and wicked genius well enough, and he delayed not to put it in execution, *ver. 22.* When an unnatural rebellion was the opera, what fitter prologue could there be to it than such unnatural lust? Thus was his wickedness all of a piece, and such, as a conscience not quite seared could not entertain the thoughts of, without the utmost horror. Nay, the client outdoes what his counsel advises: Ahithophel bid him do it, that all Israel might hear of it, but as if that were not enough, so perfectly lost is he to all honour and virtue, he will do it, and all Israel shall see it. A tent is accordingly spread on the top of the house for the purpose; so impudently did he declare his sin as Sodom. Yet in this, the word of God was fulfilled, in the letter of it: God had threatened, by Nathan, that for his defiling Bath-sheba, he should have his own wives publicly debauched, *chap. xii. 11, 12.* and some think Ahithophel in advising it, designed to be revenged on David for the injury done to Bathsheba, who was his grand-daughter: For she was the daughter of Eliam, *chap. xi. 3.* who was the son of Ahithophel, *chap. xxiii. 34.* Job speaks of it as the just punishment of adultery, *chap.*

xxxii. 9, 10. *let my wife grind to another*; and the prophet, *Hos. iv. 13, 14.* What to think of these concubines, who submitted to this wickedness, I know not, but how unrighteous soever Absalom and they are, we must say *the Lord is righteous*: nor shall any word of his fall to the ground.

C H A P. XVII.

The contest between David and Absalom is now hastning towards a crisis: It must be determined by the sword, and for that preparation is made in this chapter. 1. Absalom calls a council of war, in which Abithophel advises him to dispatch, ver. 1;---4. but Hushai advises him to deliberation, ver. 5;---13. and Hushai's counsel is agreed to, ver. 14. for vexation at which Abithophel hangs himself, ver. 23. 2. Secret intelligence is sent to David (but with much difficulty) of their proceedings, ver. 15, ---21. 3. David marches to the other side Jordan, ver. 22,---24. and there his camp is victualled by some of his friends in that country, ver. 27,---29. 4. Absalom and his forces march after him into the land of Gilead on the other side Jordan, ver. 25, 26. there we shall in the next chapter find the cause decided by a battle: hitherto every thing has looked black upon poor David, but now the day of his deliverance begins to dawn.

1. **M**oreover, Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night. 2. And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak-handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee, and I will smite the king only. 3. And I will bring back all the people unto thee: the man whom thou seekest, is as if all returned: so all the people shall be in peace. 4. And the saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel. 5. Then said Absalom, Call now Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear likewise what he saith. 6. And when Hushai was come to Absalom, Absalom spake unto him, saying, Ahithophel hath spoken after this manner: shall we do after his saying? If not, speak thou. 7. And Hushai said unto Absalom, the counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time. 8. For (said Hushai) thou knowest thy father and his men, that they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field: and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people. 9. Behold, he is hid now in some pit, or in some other place: and it will come to pass, when some of them be overthrown at the first, that whosoever heareth it, will say, There is a slaughter among the people that follow Absalom. 10. And he also that is valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion, shall utterly melt: for all Israel knoweth that thy father is a mighty man, and they which be with him are valiant men. 11. Therefore I counsel, that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude, and that thou go to battle in thine own person. 12. So shall we come upon him in some place where he shall be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground: and of him, and of all the men that are with him, there shall not be left so much as one. 13. Moreover, if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river, until there be not one small stone found there. 14. And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel: for the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom.

Absalom is in peaceable possession of Jerusalem, the palace royal is his own, and the thrones of judgment, even the thrones of the house of David; his good father reigned in Hebron, and only over the tribe of Judah above seven years, and was not hasty to destroy his rival, his government was built upon a divine promise, which he was sure of the performance of in due time, and therefore waited patiently in the mean time: But the young man, Absalom, not

not only hastens from Hebron to Jerusalem, but there is impatient till he has destroyed his father; cannot be content with his throne till he has his life; for his government is founded in iniquity, and therefore feels it self tottering, and thinks it self obliged to do every thing with violence. That so profligate a wretch as Absalom should aim at the throne of so good a father, is not so strange, there are here and there monsters in nature, but that the body of the people of Israel, to whom David had been so great a blessing in all respects, should join with him in it, is very amazing. But their fathers oft mutinied against Moses. The best of parents, and the best of princes will not think it strange, if they be made uneasy by those who should be their support and joy, when they consider what sons and what subjects David himself had.

David, and all that adhered to him must be cut off. That is resolved for ought appears, *nemine contradicente*. None dares mention his personal merits, and great services done to his country in opposition to this resolve, nor so much as ask why, *what evil has he done* to forfeit his crown, much less his head? None dares propose that his banishment suffice for the present, or that agents be sent to treat with him to resign the crown, which having so tamely quitted the city, they might think he would easily be persuaded to do: It was not long since Absalom himself fled for a crime, and David contented himself with his being an exile, though he deserved death, nay, he mourned and longed for him, but so perfectly void of all natural affection is this ungrateful Absalom, that he perfectly thirsts after his own father's blood: It is past dispute, David must be destroyed, all the question is, how it may be done.

1. Ahithophel adviseth that he be pursued immediately, this very night, with a flying army, which he himself undertakes the command of, that the king only be smitten, and his forces dispersed, and then the people that were now for him, would fall in with Absalom of course, and there would not be such a long war as had been between the house of Saul and David, *ver. 1, 2, 3. The man whom thou seekest is as if all returned.* By this it appears, Absalom had declared his design to be upon David's life, and Ahithophel concurs with him in it, *Smite the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered*, and be an easy prey to the wolf. Thus he contrives to include the war in a little compass, by fighting neither with small nor great, but the king of Israel only, and to conclude it in a little time, by falling upon him presently. Nothing could have been more fatal to David, than the taking of these measures: It was too true, that he was weary and weak-handed; that a little thing would make him afraid, else he had not out-run his house upon the first alarm of Absalom's rebellion; it was probable enough that upon a fierce attack, especially in the night, the small force he had, would be put into confusion and disorder, and it would be an easy thing to *smite the king only*, and then the business was done, the whole nation would be reduced of course, and *all the people, saith he, shall be in peace.* See how a general ruin is called by usurpers a general peace; but thus the devil's palace is in peace, while he, as a strong man armed, keeps it. Compare with this the plot of Caiaphas (that second Ahithophel) against the son of David, to crush his interest by destroying him, let that *one man die for the people.* John xi. 50. *Kill the heir, and the inheritance shall be ours;* Mat. xxi. 38. But the counsel of them both was turned into foolishness. Yet the children of light may in their generation learn wisdom from the children of this world. What our hand finds to do, let us do it quickly, and with all our might. It is prudence to be vigorous and expeditious, and not to lose time. Particularly in our spiritual warfare, if Satan flee from us, let us follow our blow.

They that have quarrelled with crowned heads, have generally observed the decorum of declaring only against their evil counsellors, and calling them to an account, *the king himself can do no wrong*, it is they that do it, but Absalom's bare-faced villainy strikes at the king directly, nay, at the king only, for would you think it? This saying, *I will smite the king only*, pleased Absalom well, *ver. 4.* nor had he so much sense of honour and virtue left him, as to take on him to startle at it, or even to pretend reluctance in this barbarous and monstrous resolution. What good can stand before the heat of a furious ambition?

2. Hushai adviseth that they be not too hasty in pursuing David, but take time to draw up all their force against him, and to overpower him with numbers, as Ahithophel had advised to take him by surprize. Now Hushai in giving this counsel really intended to serve David and his interest; that he might have time to send him notice of his proceedings, and that David might gain time to gather an army, and to remove into those countries beyond Jordan, which lying more remote, Absalom probably had got least interest in. Nothing would be of greater advantage to David in this juncture, than time to turn him in; that he may have that, Hushai counsels Absalom to do nothing rashly, but to proceed with caution, and secure his success, by securing his strength.

Now, 1. Absalom gave Hushai a fair invitation to advise him. All the elders of Israel approved of Ahithophel's counsel, yet God over-ruled the heart of Absalom not to proceed upon it, till he had advised with Hushai, *ver. 5. let us hear what he saith.* Herein he thought he did wisely, two heads is better than one, but God taketh the wise in their own craftiness. See Mr. Pool's note on this.

No. XXIV.

2. Hushai gave good reasons for what he said.

1. He argued against Ahithophel's counsel, and undertook to shew the danger of following his advice. It is with modesty and all possible deference to his settled reputation; that he begs leave to differ from him, *ver. 7.* The counsel of Ahithophel always useth to be the best, and such as may be relied on; but with submission to that noble peer, he is of opinion, that his counsel is not good at this time, for it was by no means safe to venture so great a cause as that, in which they were now engaged upon so small a number; and such a hasty folly as Ahithophel advised; remembering the defeat of Israel before Ai, *Josh. vii. 4.* It has often proved of ill consequence to despise an enemy. See how plausible Hushai reasons: 1. He insists much upon it that David was a great soldier; a man of great conduct, courage, and experience; all knew, and owned this, even Absalom himself, *thy father is a man of war, ver. 8. a mighty man;* *ver. 10.* and not so weary and weak-handed as Ahithophel imagines. His retiring from Jerusalem must be imputed not to his cowardise; but his prudence. 2. His attendants, though few, were mighty men, *ver. 8.* valiant men, men of celebrated bravery; and versed in all the arts of war: Ahithophel, who, perhaps, had worn the gown more than the sword, would find himself an unequal match for them. *One of them would chase a thousand.* 3. They were all exasperated against Absalom, who was the author of all this mischief, were chafed in their minds, and would fight with the utmost fury: so that, what with their courage, and what with their rage, there would be no standing before them, especially for such fresh water soldiers as Absalom's generally were. Thus doth he represent them as formidable, as Ahithophel had made them despicable. 4. He suggests it probable, that David and some of his choice men would lie in ambush, in some pit, or other close place, and fall upon Absalom's soldiers before they were aware, the terror of which would put them to flight; and the defeat, though but of a small party, would dispirit all the rest, especially their own consciences, at the same time accusing them of treason, against one that they were sure was not only God's anointed, *but a man after his own heart, ver. 9.* It will soon be given out, that there is a slaughter among Absalom's men, and then they will all make the best of their way, and the heart of Ahithophel himself, though now it seems like the heart of a lion, will utterly melt. In short, he will not find it so easy a matter to deal with David and his men as he thinks it is; and if he be foiled, we are all routed.

2. He offered his own advice and gave his reasons; and

1. He counselled that which he knew would gratify Absalom's proud vain-glorious humour, though it would not be really serviceable to his interest. (1.) He adviseth that all Israel should be gathered together, *i. e.* the militia of all the tribes; his taking it for granted they were all for him, and giving him an opportunity to see them altogether under his command, would gratify him as much as any thing. (2.) He adviseth that Absalom go to battle in his own person, as if he looked upon him to be a better soldier than Ahithophel, more fit to give command, and have the honour of the victory, insinuating that Ahithophel had put a slight upon him, in offering to go without him; see how easy it is to betray proud men, by applauding them, and feeding their pride.

2. He counselled that which seemed to secure the success at last infallibly, without running any hazard: For if they could raise such vast numbers as they promised themselves, wherever they found him they should not fail to crush him: 1. If in the field, they should fall upon him, as the dew that covers the face of the ground, and cut off all his men with him. *ver. 12.* Perhaps, Absalom was better pleased with the design of cutting off all the men that were with him, having a particular antipathy to some of David's friends, than with Ahithophel's project of smiting the king only. Thus Hushai gained his point by humouring his revenge, as well as his pride. 2. If in a city, they need not fear conquering him, for they should have hands enow, if occasion were, to draw the city itself into its river with ropes, *ver. 13.* This odd contrivance, how impracticable soever, being new, served for an amazement, and recommended it self by pleasing the fancy, for they would all smile at the humour of it.

By all these arts, Hushai gained not only Absalom's approbation of his advice, but the unanimous concurrence of this great council of war; they all agreed, the counsel of Hushai is better than the counsel of Ahithophel, *ver.* See here, 1. How much the policy of man can do; if Hushai had not been there, Ahithophel's counsel had certainly prevailed: And, though never so many had given their opinion, nothing could be really more for Absalom's interest than that which he advised, and yet, Hushai, with his management, brings them all over to his side; and none of them are aware, that he saith all this in favour of David and his interest, but all say as he saith. See how the unthinking part are imposed upon by the designing part of mankind, what tools, what fools great men make of one another, by their intrigues, and what tricks there are often in courts and councils, which they are happiest that are least conversant with. 2. See how much more the providence of God can do: Hushai humoured the thing well enough, yet the success is ascribed to God, and his agency on the minds of those concerned. *The Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel.* Be it observed to the comfort of all that feared God,

he turns all men's hearts as the rivers of water, though *they know not the thoughts of the Lord*. He stands in the congregation of the mighty, has an over-ruling hand in all counsels, and a negative voice in all resolves, and laughs at mens projects against his anointed.

15. ¶ Then said Hushai unto Zadok, and to Abiathar the priests, Thus and thus did Ahithophel counsel Abfalom and the elders of Israel; and thus and thus have I counselled. 16. Now therefore send quickly, and tell David, saying, Lodge not this night in the plains of the wilderness, but speedily pass over; lest the king be swallowed up, and all the people that *are* with him. 17. Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz stayed by En-rogel, (for they might not be seen to come into the city) and a wench went and told them: and they went and told king David. 18. Nevertheless a lad saw them, and told Abfalom: but they went both of them away quickly, and came to a man's house in Bahurim, which had a well in his court, whither they went down. 19. And the woman took and spread a covering over the wells mouth, and spread ground corn thereon; and the thing was not known. 20. And when Abfaloms servants came to the woman to the house, they said, Where is Ahimaaz and Jonathan? And the woman said unto them, They be gone over the brook of water. And when they had sought and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem. 21. And it came to pass after they were departed, that they came up out of the well, and went and told king David, and said unto David, Arise, and pass quickly over the water: for thus hath Ahithophel counselled against you.

We must now leave David's enemies pleasing themselves with the thoughts of a sure victory, by following Hushai's counsel, and sending summons, no doubt, to all the tribes of Israel, to come to the general rendezvous at a place appointed, pursuant to that counsel; and we next find David's friends in a close cabal, consulting how to get him notice of all this, that he might steer his course accordingly. Hushai tells the priests what had passed in council, *ver.* 15. But it should seem he was not sure, but that yet Ahithophel's counsel might be followed, and was therefore jealous, lest if he made not the best of his way the king would be *swallowed up*, and *all the people that were with him*, *ver.* 16. Perhaps, as he was called in to give his advice, *ver.* 5. so he was dismissed before they came to that resolve, *ver.* 14. in favour of his advice: Or he feared they might afterwards change their mind: However, it was good to provide against the worst, and therefore to hasten these valuable lives out of the reach of these destroyers.

Such strict guards did Abfalom set upon all the avenues to Jerusalem, that they had much ado to get this necessary intelligence to David. 1. The young priests that were to be the messengers, were forced to sneak out of the city, by En-rogel; which signifies, as some say, *the fountain of a spring*. Sure it went ill with Jerusalem, when two such faithful priests as they were, might not be seen to come into the city. 2. Instructions were sent to them by a poor simple wench, who, probably, went to that well, under pretence of fetching water, *ver.* 17. If she carried the message by word of mouth, there was danger of her making some mistake or blunder in it; but providence can make a silly girl a trusty messenger, and serve its wise counsels by the foolish things of the world. 3. Yet by the vigilance of Abfalom's spies, they were discovered, and information brought to Abfalom of their motions. *I did see them and told him*, *ver.* 18. They being aware that they were discovered, sheltered themselves in a friend's house in Bahurim, where David had refreshed himself but just before, *chap.* xvi. 14. there they were happily hid in a well, which, now in summer time, perhaps, was dry, *ver.* 18. The woman of the house very ingeniously covered the mouth of the well with a cloth, on which she spread corn to dry, so that the pursuers were not aware that there was a well, and they had searched it, *ver.* 19. Thus far the woman did well; but we know not how to justify her further, concealing them with a lie, *ver.* 20. We must not do evil that good may come of it. However, hereby the messengers were protected, and the pursuers were defeated, and returned to Abfalom without their prey: It was well Abfalom did not hereupon fall upon their two sisters, Zadok and Abiathar, as Saul on Ahimelech for his kindness to David: But God restrained him. Being thus preserved, they brought their intelligence very faithfully to David, *ver.* 21. with this advice of his friends, that he should not delay to pass over Jordan, near to which, it seems, he was now set down: And there, as some think, he penned the forty second and forty third Psalms, looking back upon Jerusalem from the land of Jordan, *Psal.* xlii. 6.

22. Then David arose, and all the people that were with him, and they passed over Jordan: by the morn-

ing light there lacked not one of them that was not gone over Jordan. 23. ¶ And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father. 24. Then David came to Mahanaim: and Abfalom passed over Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him. 25. ¶ And Abfalom made Amasa captain of the host in stead of Joab: which Amasa was a mans son whose name was Ithra an Israelite, that went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister to Zeruiah, Joabs mother. 26. So Israel and Abfalom pitched in the land of Gilead. 27. And it came to pass when David was come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lodebar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim, 28. Brought beds, and basons, and catten vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse. 29. And honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat: for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness.

Here is, 1. The transporting of David and his forces over Jordan, pursuant to the advice he had received from his friends at Jerusalem, *ver.* 22. He, and all that were with him went over in the night, whether in ferry boats, which probably always plyed there, or through the fords, doth not appear: But special notice may be taken of it, that there lacked not one of them; none deserted him, though his distress was great, none staid behind sick or weary, nor were any lost or cast away in the river. Herein some make him a type of the Messiah, who said in a difficult day, *Of all that thou hast given me, have I left none*. Being got over Jordan, he marched many miles forwards to Mahanaim, a Levites city in the tribe of Gad, in the utmost border of that tribe, and not far from Rabbah, the chief city of the Ammonites. This city which Ithobotheth had made his royal city, *chap.* ii. 8. David now made his head quarters, *ver.* 24. And now he had time to raise an army wherewith to oppose the rebels, and give them a warm reception.

2. The death of Ahithophel, *ver.* 23. He died by his own hands, *seis de se*, hanged himself for vexation, that his counsel was not followed; for thereby, 1. He thought himself slighted, and an intolerable slur cast upon his reputation for wisdom. His judgment always used to sway at the council board, but now, another's opinion is thought wiser and better than his, his proud heart cannot bear the affront, it rises and swells, and the more he thinks of it, the more violent his resentments grow, till they bring him at last to this desperate resolve, not to live to see another preferred before him. All men think him a wise man, but he thinks himself the only wise man, and therefore to be revenged upon mankind for not thinking so too, he will die, that wisdom may die with him. The world is not worthy of such an oracle as he is, and therefore he will make them know the want of him. See what real enemies they are to themselves, that think too well of themselves, and what mischiefs they run upon that are impatient of contempt. That will break a proud man's heart, that will not break an humble man's sleep. 2. He thought himself endangered, and his life exposed. He concluded, that because his counsel was not followed, Abfalom's cause would certainly miscarry, and then whoever would find David's mercy, he concluded, that he, who was the greatest criminal, and had particularly advised him to lie with his father's concubines, must be sacrificed to his justice; to prevent therefore the shame and terror of a publick and solemn execution, he thus doth justice upon himself, and after all his reputation for wisdom, by this, his last act, puts a far greater disgrace upon himself, than Abfalom's privy council had put upon him, and answers his name Ahithophel, which signifies, *the brother of a fool*. Nothing exalteth folly, so as self-murder doth. Observe, how deliberately he did it, and of malice prepense against himself; not in a heat, but he went home to his city, to his house to do it; and, which is strange, took time to consider of it, and yet did it. And to prove himself *compos mentis* when he did it, he first put his household in order, made his will as a man of sane memory and understanding, settled his estate, balanced his accounts; yet he that had sense and prudence enough to do this, had not consideration enough to revoke the sentence his pride and passion had past upon his own neck, or so much as to suspend the execution of it till he saw the event. Now herein, we may see, 1. Contempt poured upon the wisdom of man; he that was more renowned for policy than ever any man was, plaid the fool with himself more than ever any man did. *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, when he sees him that was so great an oracle dying as a fool dies.* 2. Honour done to the justice of God. When the wicked is thus *seared in the work of their own hands, and sunk in a pit of their own digging*

digging, the Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth, and we must say, *Higgaion, Selah*, it is a thing to be marked and meditated upon, *Psalms* vii. 15, 16. 3. Prayer answered, and an honest cause served even by its enemies. Now as David had prayed, Ahithophel's counsel was turned into foolishness to himself. Dr. Lightfoot supposeth, that David penned the fifty-fifth Psalm, upon occasion of Ahithophel's being in the plot against him, and that he is the man complained of, *ver.* 13. that had been his equal, his guide, and his acquaintance, and if so, this was an immediate answer to his prayer there, *ver.* 15. *Let death seize upon them, let them go down quick into hell.* And Ahithophel's death was an advantage to David's interest; for had he digested that affront (as those must resolve to do a great many, that will live in this world) and continued his post at Absalom's elbow, he might have given him counsel afterwards, that might have been of pernicious consequence to David. It is well that breath is stopt, and that head laid, from which nothing could be expected but mischief. It seems it was not then usual to disgrace the dead bodies of self-murderers, for Ahithophel was buried, we may suppose honourably buried, in the sepulchre of his father, though he deserved no better than the burial of an ass: see *Eccles.* viii. 10.

3. Absalom's pursuit of his father; he had now got all the men of Israel with him, as Hushai advised, and he himself at the head of them passed over Jordan, *ver.* 24. not content that he had driven his good father to the utmost corner of his kingdom, he resolves to chase him out of the world. He pitched in the land of Gilead with all his forces, ready to give David battle, *ver.* 26. Absalom made one Amasa his general, *ver.* 25. whose father was by birth Jether, an Ishmaelite, *1 Chron.* ii. 17. but by religion Ithra (as he is here called) an Israelite; probably, he was not only profelyted, but, having married a near relation of David's, was, by some act of the state, naturalized, and is therefore called an Israelite. His wife, Amasa's mother, was Abigail, David's sister; his other sister, Zeruah, Joab's mother, *1 Chron.* ii. 16. So that Amasa was in the same relation to David that Joab was. In honour to his family, even while he was in arms against his father, Absalom made him commander in chief of all his forces. Jesse is here called Nahath, for many had two names; or, perhaps, it was his wife's name.

4. The friends David met with in this distant country. Even Shobi, a younger brother of the royal family of the Ammonites, was kind to him, *ver.* 27. it is probable, he had detested the indignity which his brother Hanun had done to David's ambassadors, and for that had received favours from David, which he now returns. Those that think their prosperity most confirmed, know not, but some time or other, they may stand in need of the kindness of those that now lie at their mercy, and may be glad to be beholden to them; which is a reason, why we should, as we have opportunity, do good to all men, for he that watereth, shall be watered also himself, when there is occasion. Machir, the son of Ammiel, was he that maintained Mephibosheth, *chap.* ix. 4. till David eased him of that charge; and is now repaid for it, by that generous man, who, it seems, was the common patron of distressed princes. Barzillai we shall hear of again. These, compassionating David and his men, now they were weary with a long march, brought him furniture for his house, beds and basins; and provision for his table, wheat and barley, &c. *ver.* 28, 29. He did not put them under contribution, did not compel them to supply him, much less plunder them, but, in token of their dutiful affection to him, their firm adherence to his government, and their sincere concern for him in his present straits, of their own good will, they brought in plenty of all that which he had occasion for. Let us learn hence to be generous and open-handed, according as our ability is, to all in distress, especially great men, to whom it is most grievous, and good men, who deserve better treatment; and see how God sometimes makes up to his people that comfort from strangers, which they are disappointed of in their own families.

C H A P. XVIII.

This chapter puts a period to Absalom's rebellion and life, and so makes way for David in his throne again, whither the next chapter brings him back in peace and triumph. Here is, 1. David's preparations to engage the rebels, *ver.* 1,---5. 2. The total defeat of Absalom's party, and their dispersion, *ver.* 6,---8. 3. The death of Absalom, and his burial, *ver.* 9,---18. 4. The bringing of the tidings of it to David, who tarried at Mahanaim, *ver.* 19,---32. 5. His bitter lamentation at Absalom, *ver.* 33.

1. **A**N D David numbred the people that were with him, and set captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds over them. 2. And David sent forth a third part of the people under the hand of Joab, and a third part under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruah Joab's brother, and a third part under the hand of

Ittai the Gittite: and the king said unto the people, will surely go forth with you my self also. 3. But the people answered, Thou shalt not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us: but now thou art worth ten thousand of us: therefore now it is better that thou succour us out of the city. 4. And the king said unto them, What seemeth you best, I will do. And the king stood by the gate-side, and all the people came out by hundreds, and by thousands. 5. And the king commanded Joab, and Abishai, and Ittai, saying, Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom. And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom. 6. ¶ So the people went out into the field against Israel: and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim; 7. Where the people of Israel were slain before the servants of David, and there was there a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand men. 8. For the battle was there scattered over the face of all the country: and the wood devoured more people that day, than the sword devoured.

Which way David raised an army here, and what reinforcements were sent him, we are not told, many, it is likely, from all the coasts of Israel, at least from the neighbouring tribes, came in to his assistance, so that by degrees he was able to make head against Absalom, as Ahithophel foresaw. Now here we have,

1. His army numbred and marshalled, *ver.* 1, 2. He had, no doubt, committed his cause to God by prayer, for that was his relief in all his afflictions, and then he took an account of his forces; Josephus saith, they were in all but about four thousand: these he divided into regiments, and companies, to each of which he appointed proper officers, and then disposed them, as is usual, into the right wing, the left wing, and the centre, two of which he committed to his old experienced generals, Joab and Abishai, and the third to his new friend Ittai. Good order and good conduct may sometimes be as serviceable in an army, as great numbers. Wisdom teacheth us to make the best of the strength we have, and let it reach to the utmost.

2. Himself over-persuaded not to go in person to the battle. He was Absalom's back-friend that persuaded him to go, and served his pride more than his prudence, David's true friends would not let him go, remembering what they had been told of Ahithophel's design to smite the king only. David shewed his affection to them, in being willing to venture with them, *ver.* 2. and they shewed theirs to him by opposing it. We must never reckon it an affront to be gainayed for our good, and by those that therein consult our interest. 1. They would by no means have him to expose himself, for (say they) thou art worth ten thousand of us. Thus ought good princes to be valued by their subjects, who, for their safety, must be willing to expose themselves. 2. They would not so far gratify the enemy, who would rejoice more in his fall, than in the defeat of the whole army. 3. He might be more serviceable to them, by tarrying in the city, with a reserve of his forces there, from whence he might send them recruits. That may be a post of real service, which yet is not a post of danger. The king acquiesced in their reasons, and changed his purpose, *ver.* 4. *What seemeth you best, I will do.* It is no piece of wisdom to be stiff in our resolutions, but to be willing to hear reason, even from our inferiors, and to be over-ruled by their advice, when it appears to be for our own good. Whether the peoples prudence had an eye to it or no, God's providence wisely ordered it, that David should not be in the field of battle, for then his tenderness had certainly interposed to save Absalom's life, whom God had determined to destroy.

3. The charge he gave concerning Absalom, *ver.* 5. When the army was drawn out rank and file, Josephus saith, he encouraged them, and prayed for them, but withal bid them all take heed of doing Absalom any hurt. How doth he render good for evil! Absalom would have David only smitten, David would have Absalom only spared. What foils are these to each other! Never was unnatural hatred to a father so strong as in Absalom, nor was ever natural affection to a child so strong as in David; in those each did their utmost, and shewed what they could do; how bad it is possible for a child to be to the best of fathers, and how good it is possible for a father to be to the worst of children, as if it were designed to be a resemblance of man's wickedness towards God, and God's mercy towards man, of which it is hard to say, whether is more amazing. Deal gently, saith David, by all means, with the young man, even with Absalom, for my sake; he is a young man, rash and heady, and his age must excuse him: he is mine, whom I love, if you love me, be not severe with him. This charge supposeth David's strong expectation of success, having a good cause, and a good God; he doubts not but Absalom would lie at their mercy, and therefore bids them deal gently with him, spare his life, and reserve him for his judgment.

Bishop Hall thus descants on this; "What means this ill placed love? this unjust mercy? Deal gently with a traitor? of all traitors with a son? of all sons with an Absalom? that graceful darling of so good a father? and all this for thy sake, whose crown, whose blood he hunts after? For whose sake must he be pursued, if forborn for thine? Must the cause of the quarrel be the motive of mercy? Even in the holiest parents, nature may be guilty of an injurious tenderness, of a bloody indulgence. But (saith he) was not this done in type of that unmeasurable mercy of the true King and Redeemer of Israel, who prayed for his persecutors, for his murderers; *Father, forgive them. Deal gently with them for my sake.*" When God sends an affliction to correct his children, it is with this charge, deal gently with them for my sake; for he knows our frame.

4. A compleat victory gained over Absalom's forces. The battle was fought *in the wood of Ephraim*, ver. 6. so called from some memorable action of the Ephraimites there, though it lay in the tribe of Gad. David thought fit to meet the enemy with his forces at some distance before they came up to Mahanaim, lest he should bring that city into trouble, which had so kindly sheltered him. The cause shall be decided by a pitched battle; Josephus represents the fight as very obstinate, but the rebels were at length totally routed, and twenty thousand men of them slain, ver. 7. Now they smarted justly for their treason against their lawful prince, their uneasiness under so good a government, and their base ingratitude to so good a governor, and found what it was to take up arms for a usurper, who with his kisses and caresses had wheedled them into their own ruin. Now where are the rewards, the preferments, the golden days, they promised themselves from him? Now they see what it is to take counsel *against the Lord, and his anointed*, and to think of *breaking his bonds asunder*. And that they might see God fought against them, 1. They are conquered by a few, an army, in all probability, much inferior to theirs in number. 2. By that flight, with which they hoped to save themselves, they destroyed themselves; *the wood*, which they fought to for shelter, *devoured more than the sword*, that they might see how, when they thought themselves safe from David's men, and said, surely the bitterness of death is past, yet the justice of God pursued them, and suffered them not to live. What refuge can rebels find from divine vengeance? The pits and bogs, the stumps and thickets, and, as the Chaldee paraphrast understands it, the wild beasts of the wood were the death of multitudes of the dispersed, distracted Israelites, some think, beside the twenty thousand that were slain with the sword. God herein fought for David, and yet fought against him; for all these that were slain were his own subjects, and the common interest of his kingdom was weakened by it. The Romans allowed no triumph for a victory in a civil war.

9. ¶ And Absalom met the servants of David; and Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth, and the mule that *was* under him went away. 10. And a certain man saw it, and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak. 11. And Joab said unto the man that told him, And behold, thou sawest him, and why didst thou not smite him there to the ground, and I would have given thee ten *shekels* of silver, and a girdle? 12. And the man said unto Joab, Though I should receive a thousand *shekels* of silver in mine hand, yet would I not put forth mine hand against the king's son: for in our hearing the king charged thee, and Abishai, and Ittai, saying, Beware that none *touch* the young man Absalom. 13. Otherwise, I should have wrought falsehood against mine own life: for there is no matter hid from the king, and thou thy self wouldst have set thy self against me. 14. Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he *was* yet alive in the midst of the oak. 15. And ten young men that bare Joab's armour, compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him. 16. And Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing after Israel: for Joab held back the people. 17. And they took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him: and all Israel fled every one to his tent. 18. ¶ Now Absalom in his life-time had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which *is* in the king's dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name, and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place.

Here is Absalom in a wood too, quite at a loss; at his wits end first, and then at his life's end. He that began the fight big with expectation of triumphing over David himself, with whom, if he had had him in his power, he would not have dealt gently, is now in the greatest consternation, when he *meets the servants of David*, ver. 9. Though they were forbidden to meddle with him, he durst not look them in the face; but, finding they were near him (to use a common expression) he elaps spurs to his mule, and makes the best of his way, through thick and thin, as we say, and so rides headlong upon his own destruction. Thus *he that flies from the fear, shall fall into the pit, and he that getteth up out of the pit, shall be taken in the snare*, Jer. xlviii. 44. David is inclined to spare him, but divine justice passeth sentence upon him as a traitor, and sees it executed; that he hang by the neck; he caught alive, be bowelled, and his body disposed of disgracefully.

1. He is hanged by the neck, Riding furiously, neck or nothing, *under the thick boughs of a great oak*, which hung low, and had been never cropped, either the twisted branches, or some one forked bough of the oak, caught hold of his head, either by his neck, or, as some think, by his long hair, which had been so much his pride, and was now justly made a halter for him, and there he hung, so astonished, that he could not use his hands to help himself, or so entangled, that his hands could not help him, but the more he struggled, the more he was embarrassed. This set him up for a fair mark to the servants of David, and he had the terror and shame of seeing himself thus exposed, while he could do nothing for his own relief, neither fight nor fly.

Observe concerning this, 1. That his *mule went away from under him*, as if glad to get clear of such a burthen, and resign it to the ignominious tree. Thus the whole creation groans under the burthen of man's corruption, but shall shortly be delivered from its load, Rom. viii. 21, 22. 2. That he hung *between heaven and earth*, as unworthy of either, as abandoned of both; earth would not keep him, heaven would not take him, hell therefore opens her mouth to receive him. 3. That this was a very surprizing unusual thing; it was fit it should be so, his crime being so monstrous: if in his flight his mule had thrown him, and left him half dead upon the ground, till the servants of David had come up, and dispatched him, the same thing had been done as effectually; but that had been too common a fate for so uncommon a criminal; God will here, as in the case of those other rebels, Dathan and Abiram, *create a new thing*, that it may be understood, how much *this man has provoked the Lord*, Numb. xvi. 29, 30. Absalom is here hung up, *in terrorem*, to frighten children from disobedience to their parents; see Prov. xxx. 17.

2. He is caught alive by one of the servants of David, who went straight and told Joab in what posture he found that arch rebel, ver. 10. Thus was he set up for a spectacle, as well as a mark, that the righteous might see him, and *laugh at him*, Psalm lii. 6. while he has this further vexation in his breast, that of all the friends he had courted and confided in, and thought he had sure in his interest, though he hung long enough to have been relieved, yet he had none at hand to disentangle him. Joab chides the man for not dispatching him, ver. 11. telling him, if he had given that bold stroke, he would have rewarded him with ten half crowns, and a girdle, *i. e.* a captain's commission, which, perhaps, was signified by the delivery of a belt or girdle; see Isa. xxii. 21. But the man, though zealous enough against Absalom, justified himself in not doing it: dispatch him! saith he, not for all the world; it would have cost me my head: thou thy self wast witness to the king's charge concerning him, ver. 12. and, for all thy talk, wouldst have been my prosecutor, if I had done it, ver. 13. Those that love the treason, hate the traitor. Joab could not deny this, nor blame the man for his caution, and therefore makes him no answer, but breaks off the discourse under colour of haste, ver. 14. *I may not tarry thus with thee*. Superiors should consider a reproof before they give it, lest they be ashamed of it afterwards, and find themselves unable to make it good.

3. He is (as I may say) bowelled and quartered, as traitors are, so pitifully mangled is he as he hangs there, and receives his death in such a manner, as to see all its terrors, and feel all its pain. 1. Joab throws three darts into his body, which put him, no doubt, to exquisite torment, while yet he is *alive in the midst of the oak*, ver. 14. I know not, whether Joab can be justified in this direct disobedience to the command of his sovereign; was this to *deal gently with the young man*? Would David have suffered him to do it, if he had been upon the spot? Yet this may be said for him, that while he broke the order of a too indulgent father, he did real service both to his king and country, and had endangered the welfare of both, if he had not done it. *Salus populi suprema lex*. 2. Joab's young men, ten of them, have each of them a blow or throw at him, before he is dispatched, ver. 15. they surrounded him, made a ring about him in triumph; and then *smote him; and slew him*. So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord. Joab hereupon sounds a retreat, ver. 16. the danger is over now Absalom is slain; the people will soon return to their allegiance to David, and therefore no more blood shall be spilt; no prisoners are taken, to be tried as traitors, and made examples; let every man return

return to his tent; they are all the king's subjects, all his good subjects again.

4. His body is disposed of disgracefully, *ver. 17, 18.* They *cast it into a great pit in the wood*; they would not bring it to his father, for that circumstance would but have added to his grief, nor would they preserve it to be buried according to his order, but threw it into the next pit with indignation. Now where is his beauty he had been so proud of, and for which he had been so much admired. Where are his aspiring projects, and the castles he had built in the air? His thoughts perish, and he with them. And to signify how heavy *his iniquity lay upon his bones*, as the prophet speaks, *Ezek. xxxii. 27.* they raised a *great heap of stones upon him*, to be a monument of his villainy, and to signify that he ought to have been stoned as a rebellious son, *Deut. xxi. 21.* Travellers say, the place is taken notice of to this day, and it is common for passengers to throw a stone to this heap, with words to this purpose: *Cursed be the memory of rebellious Absalom, and cursed for ever be all wicked children that rise up in rebellion against their parents.* To aggravate the ignominy of Absalom's burial, the historian takes notice of a pillar he had erected in the valley of Kidron, near Jerusalem, to be a monument for himself, and keep his name in remembrance, *ver. 18.* at the foot of which, it is probable, he designed to be buried. What foolish insignificant projects do proud men fill their heads with! And what care do many people take about the disposal of their bodies, when they are dead, that have no care at all what shall become of their precious souls! Absalom had had three sons, *chap. xiv. 27.* but it seems now he had none, God had taken them away by death; and justly is a rebellious son written childless; to make up the want, he erects this pillar for a memorial; yet, in this also, providence crosseth him, and a rude heap of stones shall be his monument, instead of this marble pillar. Thus *they that exalt themselves shall be abased.* His care was to have his name kept in remembrance, and it is so, to his everlasting dishonour. He could not be content in the obscurity of the rest of David's sons, of whom nothing is recorded but their names, but would be famous, and is therefore justly made for ever infamous. The pillar shall bear his name, but not to his credit; it was designed for Absalom's glory, but proved Absalom's folly.

19. ¶ Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, Let me now run, and bear the king tidings, how that the LORD hath avenged him of his enemies. 20. And Joab said unto him, Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day: but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king's son is dead. 21. Then said Joab to Cush, Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cush bowed himself unto Joab, and ran. 22. Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab, But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after Cush. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready? 23. But howsoever (*said he*) let me run. And he said unto him, Run. Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and over-ran Cush. 24. And David sat between the two gates: and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lift up his eyes, and looked, and behold, a man running alone. 25. And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, If he be alone, *there is tidings in his mouth.* And he came apace, and drew near. 26. And the watchman saw another man running, and the watchman called unto the porter, and said, Behold, *another man running alone.* And the king said, He also bringeth tidings. 27. And the watchman said, Me thinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings. 28. And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed be the LORD thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lift up their hand against my lord the king. 29. And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and *me thy servant*, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what *it was.* 30. And the king said unto him, Turn aside, and stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still. 31. And behold, Cush came, and Cush said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee. 32. And the king said unto Cush, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cush answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man

33. ¶ And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom: would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son.

Absalom's business is done; we are now told;

1. How David was informed of it. He stayed behind at the city of Mahanaim, some miles from the wood where the battle was, and in the utmost border of the land: Absalom's scattered forces all made homewards towards Jordan, which was the contrary way from Mahanaim, so that his watchmen could perceive nothing how the battle went, till an express came on purpose to bring advice of the issue, which the king sat in the gate expecting to hear, *ver. 24.*

1. Cush was the man Joab ordered to carry the tidings, *ver. 21.* an Ethiopian, so his name signifies, and some think he was so by birth; a black that waited on Joab, probably, one of the ten that had helped to dispatch Absalom, *ver. 15.* as some think, though it was dangerous for one of those to bring the news to David, lest his fate should be the same with theirs that reported to him Saul's death and Ishbosheth's.

2. Ahimaaz the young priest (one of those who brought David intelligence of Absalom's motions, *chap. xvii. 17.*) was very forward to be the messenger of these tidings; so transported was he with joy that this cloud was blown over; let me go tell the king, that *the Lord has avenged him of his enemies*, *ver. 19.* This he desired, not so much in hope of a reward, he was above that, as that he might have the pleasure and satisfaction of bringing the king, whom he loved, this good news. Joab knew David better than Ahimaaz did, and that the tidings of Absalom's death, which must conclude the story, would spoil the acceptableness of all the rest; and he loves Ahimaaz too well to let him be the messenger of those tidings, *ver. 20.* they are fitter to be brought by a footman than by a priest. However, when Cush was gone, Ahimaaz begged hard for leave to run after him, and, with great importunity, obtained it, *ver. 22, 23.* One would wonder why he should be so very fond of this office, when another was employed in it. 1. Perhaps, it was to shew his swiftness, observing how heavily Cush ran, and that he took the worse way, though the nearest, he had a mind to shew how fast he could run, and that he could go the furthest way about, and yet beat Cush. No great praise for a priest to be swift of foot, yet, perhaps, Ahimaaz was proud of it. 2. Perhaps, it was in prudence, and tenderness to the king, that he desired it. He knew he could get before Cush, and therefore was willing to prepare the king with an amazing story, for the plain truth which Cush was ordered to tell him. If bad news must come, it is best that it come gradually, and will be the better born.

3. They are both discovered by the watchman on the gate of Mahanaim; Ahimaaz first, *ver. 24.* for though Cush had leading, he soon out-got him; but presently after Cush appeared, *ver. 25.* 1. When the king hears of one running alone, he concludes he is an express, *ver. 26.* *If he be alone, there is tidings in his mouth*, for if they had been beaten, and were flying back from the enemy, there would have been many. 2. When he hears it is Ahimaaz, he concludes he brings good news, *ver. 27.* Ahimaaz, it seems, was so famous for running cleverly, that he was known by it at a distance; and so eminently good, that it is taken for granted, if he be the messenger, the news must needs be good: *he is a good man*, zealously affected to the king's interest, and would not bring bad news. It is pity but the good tidings of the gospel should always be brought by good men, and how welcome should they be to us for their message sake!

4. Ahimaaz is very forward to proclaim the victory, *ver. 28.* cries at a distance, Peace, there is peace, peace after war, which is doubly welcome. *All is well*, my lord O king, the danger is over, and we may return, when the king pleaseth, to Jerusalem. And, when he comes near, tells him the news more particularly, they are all cut off *that lift up their hand against the king*, and, as became a priest, while he gives the king the joy of it, he gives God the glory of it, the God of peace and war, the God of salvation and victory; *Blessed be the Lord thy God*, that has done this for thee, as thy God, pursuant to the promises made to uphold thy throne, *chap. xvii. 16.* when he said this, *he fell down upon his face*, not only in reverence to the king, but in humble adoration of God, whose name he praiseth for this success. By directing David thus to give God thanks for his victory, he prepares him for the approaching news of its alloy. The more our hearts are fixed and enlarged in thanksgiving to God for our mercies, the better disposed we shall be to bear with patience the afflictions mixed with them. Poor David is so much a father, that he forgets he is a king, and therefore cannot rejoice in the news of a victory, till he knew whether the *young man Absalom be safe*; for whom his heart seems to tremble, almost as Eli's in a like case, for the ark of God. Ahimaaz soon discerns what Joab intimated to him, that the death of the king's son would make the tidings of the day very unwelcome, and therefore, in his report, leaves that matter doubtful, and though he gives occasion to suspect how it was, yet that the thunderclap

might not come too suddenly upon the poor perplexed king, he refers him to the next messenger, whom they saw coming, for a more particular account of it. When Joab sent the king's servant, viz. Cushi, and me thy servant, to bring the news, *I saw a great tumult*, occasioned by something extraordinary, as you will hear by and by, but I have nothing to say about it, I have delivered that which was my message, Cushi is better able to inform you than I am. I will not be the messenger of evil tidings; nor will I pretend to know that which I cannot give a perfect account of. He is therefore bid to stand by till Cushi came, ver. 30. and now, we may suppose, he entertains the king with a more particular account of the victory, which was the thing he came to bring the news of.

5. Cushi, the slow post, proves the sure one, and, besides the confirmation of the news of the victory which Ahimaaz had brought, ver. 31. *The Lord has avenged thee of all them that rose up against thee*; he satisfies the king's enquiry concerning Absalom, ver. 32. *Is he safe?* saith David; yes, saith Cushi, he is safe in his grave: but he tells the news so handsomely, that, how unwelcome soever the message was, the messenger could have no blame. He doth not tell him plainly Absalom was hanged, and run through, and buried under a heap of stones; but only that his fate was what he desired might be the fate of all that were traitors against the king, his crown and dignity. *The enemies of my lord the king, whoever they are, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt be as that young man is*; I need wish them no worse.

Lastly, David forgets all the joy of his deliverance, and is quite over-whelmed with the sorrowful tidings of Absalom's death, ver. 33. As soon as he perceived by Cushi's inuendo, that Absalom was dead, he asked no more questions, but fell into a passion of weeping, and retired from company, and abandoned himself to sorrow; as he was going up to his chamber, he was over-heard to say, *O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom*; alas for thee. I lament thee; how art thou fallen? *Would God I had died for thee*, and that thou hadst remained alive this day, so the Chaldee adds, *O Absalom my son, my son*. I wish I could see reason to think that this arose from a concern about Absalom's everlasting state, and that he therefore wished to have died for him, because he had good hopes of his own salvation, and of Absalom's repentance if he had lived; it rather seems to have been spoken inconsiderately, and in a passion, and it was his infirmity. He is to be blamed, 1. For shewing so great a fondness for a graceless son, that was justly abandoned both of God and man, only because he was handsome and witty it may be. 2. For quarrelling not only with divine providence, the disposals of which he ought silently to acquiesce in, but with divine justice, the judgments of which he ought to adore and subscribe to, see how Bildad argues, *Job viii. 3, 4. If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away in their transgression, thou shouldst submit, for doth God pervert judgment.* See *Lev. x. 3.* 3. For opposing the justice of the nation, which as king, he was intrusted with the administration of, and which, with other publick interests, he ought to prefer before any natural affection. 4. For despising the mercy of his deliverance, and the deliverance of his family and kingdom from Absalom's wicked designs, as if this were no mercy, nor worth giving thanks for, because it cost the life of Absalom. 5. For indulging a strong passion, and speaking unadvisedly with his lips. He now forgot his own reasonings upon the death of another child, *can I bring him back again?* And his own resolution to *keep his mouth as with a bridle, when his heart was bet within him*; and his own practice at other times, when he *quieted himself as a child that is weaned from his mother*. The best men are not always in a like good frame, what we over-loved, we are apt to over-grieve for; in each affection, therefore it is wisdom to have rule over our own spirits, and to keep a strict guard upon our selves when that is removed from us, which was very dear to us. Losers think they may have leave to speak, but little said is soon amended. The penitent, patient sufferer *sitteth alone, and keepeth silence*, Lam. iii. 28. or rather with *Jeb, blessed the name of the Lord*.

C H A P. XIX.

We left David's army in triumph, and yet David himself in tears: now here we have, 1. *His return to himself by the persuasion of Joab*, ver. 1.—8. 2. *His return to his kingdom from his present banishment.* (1.) *The men of Israel were forward of themselves to bring him back*, ver. 9, 10. (2.) *The men of Judah were dealt with by David's agents to do it*, ver. 11.—14. and did it, ver. 15. 3. *At the king's coming over Jordan Shimei's treason is pardoned*, ver. 16.—23. *Mephibosheth's failure is excused*, ver. 24.—30. *And Barzillai's kindness is thankfully owned and recompensed to his son*, ver. 31.—40. 4. *The men of Israel quarrelled with the men of Judah for not calling them to the ceremony of the king's restoration, which occasioned a new rebellion in the next chapter*, ver. 41.—43.

1. **A**ND it was told Joab, Behold, the king weepeth and mourneth for Absalom. 2. And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day, how the king was grieved for his son. 3. And the people gat them by stealth

that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle. 4. But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son. 5. And Joab came into the house to the king, and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons, and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines: 6. In that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends; for thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes, nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well. 7. Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by the LORD, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night; and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befel thee from thy youth until now. 8. Then the king arose, and sat in the gate: And they told unto all the people, saying, Behold, the king doth sit in the gate: and all the people came before the king: for Israel had fled every man to his tent.

Soon after the messengers had brought the news of the defeat and death of Absalom to the court at Mahanaim, Joab and his victorious army followed to grace the king's triumphs, and receive his further orders. Now here we are told,

1. What a damp, what a balk it was to them to find the king in tears for Absalom's death, which they construed, as a token of his displeasure against them, for what they had done, whereas they expected him to have met them with joy and thanks for their good services. It was told Joab, ver. 1. The report of it went through the army, ver. 2. *How the king was grieved for his son*. The people will take particular notice what their princes say and do: The more eyes we have upon us, and the greater our influence is, the more need we have to speak and act wisely, and to govern our passions strictly.

Nay, when they came to the city they found the king in close mourning, ver. 4. He covered his face, and would not so much as look up, nor take any notice of the generals when they attended him. It could not but surprize them to find, 1. How the king proclaimed his passion, which he ought to have been ashamed of, and which he would have striven to smother and conceal, if he had consulted either his reputation or courage, which was lessened by his mean submission to the tyranny of so absurd a passion; or his interest in the people, which would be prejudiced by his discountenancing what was done in zeal for his honour, and the publick safety. Yet, see how he avows his grief, *He cries with a loud voice, O my son Absalom*. My servants are all come home safe, but where is my son? He is dead, and dying in sin, I fear he is lost for ever, I cannot now say, *I shall go to him*, for my soul shall not be gathered with such sinners, what shall be done for thee, *O Absalom, my son, my son*. 2. How he prolonged his passion, even till the army was come up to him, which must be some time after he received the first intelligence. If he had contented himself to give vent to his passion for an hour or two, when he first heard the news it had been excusable, but to continue it thus for so ill a son as Absalom, like Jacob for so good a son as Joseph, with a resolution to go to the grave mourning, and to stain his triumphs with his tears, was very unwise, and very unworthy.

Now, see how ill this was taken by the people: They were loth to blame the king, for *whatever he did used to please them*, chap. iii. 36. but they took it as a great mortification to them. *Their victory was turned into mourning*, ver. 2. *They stole into the city as men ashamed*, ver. 3. In compliment to their sovereign, they would not rejoice in that which they perceived so afflictive to him, and yet they could not but be uneasy, that they were thus obliged to conceal their joy. Superiours ought not to put such hardships as these on their inferiours.

2. How plainly and passionately Joab reproved David for this indiscreet management of himself in this critical juncture. David never more needed the hearts of his subjects than now, nor was ever more concerned to secure his interest in their affections, and therefore whatever tended to disoblige them now, was the most impolitick thing he could do, and the greatest wrong imaginable to his friends that adhered to him. Joab therefore takes him to task, ver. 5, 6, 7. where he speaks a great deal of reason, but not with that respect and deference which he owed to his prince. *Is it fit to say to a king thou art wicked?* A plain case may be fairly pleaded with those that are above us, and they may be reproved for what they do amiss, but it must not be done with rudeness and insolence.

David did indeed need to be rowled and alarmed; and Joab thought it no time to dally with him. If superiours do that which is foolish, they must neither think it strange, nor take it ill if their inferiours tell them of it, perhaps, too bluntly. 1. Joab magnifies the services of David's soldiers. *This day they saved thy life, and therefore deserve to be taken notice of, and have reason*

to resent it, if they be not. It is implied, that Absalom, whom he honoured with his tears, sought his ruin, and the ruin of his family, while those, whom, by his tears he put a flight upon, were such as preserved him from ruin, and all that was dear to him. Great mischiefs have risen to princes from the contempt of great merits. 2. He aggravates the discouragement David had given them; *thou hast shamed their faces*, for while they have shewed such a value for thy life, thou hast shewed no value for theirs, but preferrest a wicked married lad, a false traitor to his king and country, whom we are happily rid of before all thy wise counsellors, brave commanders, and loyal subjects. What can be more absurd than to love thine enemies, and to hate thy friends. 3. He adviseth him to render himself immediately at the head of his troops, to smile upon them, welcome them home, congratulate their successes, and return them thanks for their services. Even those that may be commanded, yet expected to be thanked when they do well, and ought to be so. 4. He threatens him with another rebellion if he would not do this, intimating, that rather than serve so ungrateful a prince, he himself would head a revolt from him, and then (so confident is Joab of his own interest in the people) *there will not tarry with thee one man*. If I go, they all go. Thou hast now no cause to cry, but I will give thee something to cry for, as Josephus expresseth it, with a true and more bitter mourning.

3. How prudently and mildly David took the reproof, and counsel given him, *ver. 8*. He shook off his grief, anointed his head, and washed his face, that he might not appear unto men to mourn, and then made his appearance in publick, in the gate, which was as the guild-hall of the city: Hither the people flocked to him to congratulate his and their safety, and all was well. Note, When we are convinced of a fault we must amend it, though we are told of it by our inferiours, and indecently, or in heat and passion.

9. ¶ And all the people were at strife throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, The king saved us out of the hand of our enemies, and he delivered us out of the hand of the Philistines, and now he is fled out of the land for Absalom. 10. And Absalom whom we anointed over us is dead in battle: now therefore why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back? 11. ¶ And king David sent to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, saying, Speak unto the elders of Judah, saying, Why are ye the last to bring the king back to his house? (seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, even to his house.) 12. Ye are my brethren, ye are my bones and my flesh: wherefore then are ye the last to bring back the king? 13. And say ye to Amasa, Art thou not of my bone, and of my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if thou be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab. 14. And he bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even as *the heart of one man*, so that they sent *this word* unto the king, Return thou and all thy servants. 15. So the king returned, and came to Jordan: and Judah came to Gilgal, to go to meet the king, to conduct the king over Jordan.

It is strange that David did not immediately upon the defeat and dispersion of Absalom's forces, march with all expedition back to Jerusalem, to regain the possession of his capital city, while the rebels were all in confusion, and before they could rally again; what occasion was there to bring him back? could not he himself go back with the victorious army he had with him in Gilead? He could no doubt, but, 1. He would come back as a prince, with the consent and unanimous approbation of the people, and not as a conqueror forcing his way: To restore their liberties, and not to take this advantage to seize them, or encroach upon them. 2. He would come back in peace and safety, and be sure that he should meet with no difficulty or opposition in his return, and therefore would be satisfied that the people were well affected to him before he would stir. 3. He would come back in honour, and like himself; and therefore would come back not at the head of his forces, but in the arms of his subjects; for the prince that has wisdom and goodness enough to make himself his peoples darling, without doubt looks greater, and makes a much better figure than the prince that has strength enough to make himself his peoples terror.

It is resolved therefore that David must be brought back to Jerusalem, his own city, and his own house there, with some ceremony, and here we have that matter concerted.

1. The men of Israel (*i. e.* the ten tribes) were the first that talked of it, *ver. 9, 10*. The people were at strife about it, it was the great subject of discourse and dispute throughout all the country: Some, perhaps, exposed it, let him either come back himself, or stay where he is; others appeared zealous for it, and reasoned as follows here, to further the design, (1.) That David had formerly

helped them, had fought their battles, subdued their enemies, and done them many a good turn, and therefore it was a shame he should continue banished from their country, who had been so great a benefactor to it. Note, Good services done to the publick, though they may be forgotten for a while, yet will be remembered again, when men come to their right minds. (2.) That Absalom had now failed them. We are foolishly sick of the Cedar, and chose the branch to reign over us, but we have had enough of him, he is consumed, and we had a fair escape of being consumed with him, let us therefore return to our allegiance, and think of bringing the king back. Perhaps, this was all the strife among them, not a dispute whether the king should be brought back or no, all agreed it should be done, but they could not agree whose fault it was that it was not done; as is usual in such cases, every one justified himself, and blamed his neighbour. The people laid the fault on the elders, and the elders on the people, and one tribe upon another. Mutual excitements to the doing of a good work are laudable, but not mutual accusations for the not doing of it; for usually when publick services are neglected, all sides must share in the blame, each might do more than they do, as in reformation of manners, healing of divisions, and the like.

2. The men of Judah, with good management, were the first that did it. It is strange they were not so forward as the rest, though they were David's own tribes. David had intelligence of the good disposition of all the rest towards him, but nothing from Judah, though he had always been particularly careful of them. But we do not always find the most kindness from those whom we have most reason to expect it from. Yet David would not return till he knew the sense of his own tribe; *Judah was his lawgiver*, *Psal. lx. 7*. That his way home might be the more clear,

1. He employs Zadock and Abiathar, the two chief priests, to treat with the elders of Judah, and to excite them to give the king an invitation back to his house, even to his house, which was the glory of their tribe, *ver. 11, 12*. No men more proper to negotiate this affair than the two priests, who were firm to David's interest, were prudent men, and had a great influence upon the people. Perhaps the men of Judah were remiss and careless, and did it not because no body put them on to it, and then it was proper to stir them up to it. Many will follow that will not lead in a good work, and would do it if they were but spoken to: pity that should be wanting. Or, perhaps, they were so sensible of the greatness of the provocation they had given to David, by joining with Absalom, that they were afraid to bring him back, despairing of his favour, he therefore warrants his agents to assure them of it, with this reason, *ye are my brethren, my bone and my flesh*, and therefore I cannot be severe with you. The son of David has been pleased to call us *brethren, his bone and his flesh*, which encourageth us to hope we shall find favour with him. Or, perhaps, they were willing to see what the rest of the tribes would do, before they stirred, with which they are here upbraided; are told that the speech of all Israel is come to the king to invite him back, and shall Judah be the last, that should have been the first? Where is now the celebrated bravery of that royal tribe? Where its loyalty? Note, We should be stirred up to that which is great and good, by the examples both of our ancestors, and of our neighbours, and by the consideration of our rank. Let not the first in dignity, be last in duty.

2. He courts Amasa particularly into his interest, who had been, Absalom's general, but was his own nephew as well as Joab, *ver. 13*. He owns him for his kinsman, and promiseth him that if he would appear for him now, he would make him captain-general of all his forces in the room of Joab: Would not only pardon him, which it may be Amasa questioned, but prefer him. Sometimes there is nothing lost in purchasing the friendship of one that has been an enemy. Amasa's interest might do David good service at this juncture. But if David did wisely for himself to design Amasa this post, Joab being now grown intolerably haughty; yet he did not do kindly by Amasa to let his design be known, for it occasioned his death by Joab's hand, *chap. xx. 10*.

3. The point was hereby gained. He bowed the heart of the men of Judah to pass a vote, *nemine contradicente* for the recall of the king, *ver. 14*. God's providence by the priests persuasions, and Amasa's interest, brought them to this resolve. David stirred not till he received this invitation, and then he came as far back as Jordan, at which river they were to meet him, *ver. 15*. Our Lord Jesus will rule in those that invite him to the throne in their hearts, and not till he is invited. He first bows the heart, and makes it willing in the day of his power, and then *rules in the midst of his enemies*, *Psal. cx. 2, 3*.

16. ¶ And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, which was of Bahurim, hasted and came down with the men of Judah, to meet king David. 17. And there were a thousand men of Benjamin with him, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him; and they went over Jordan before the king. 18. And there went over a ferry-boat to carry over the king's household, and to do what he

he thought good: And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king as he was come over Jordan; 19. And said unto the king, Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversly the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart. 20. For thy servant doth know that I have sinned: therefore behold, I am come the first this day of all the house of Joseph, to go down to meet my lord the king. 21. But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD's anointed? 22. And David said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me? shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? for do not I know, that I am this day king over Israel? 23. Therefore the king said unto Shimei, Thou shalt not die: And the king sware unto him.

Perhaps, Jordan was never passed with so much solemnity, nor with so many remarkable occurrences, as it was now, since Israel passed it under Joshua. David, in his afflictive flight, remembered God particularly from the land of Jordan, Psalm xlii. 6. and now that land, more than any other, was graced with the glories of his return. David's soldiers furnished themselves with accommodations for their transport over this river, but for his own family, a ferry-boat was sent on purpose to attend that, *ver. 1, 8. a fleet of boats, say some; a bridge of boats was made, so others; the best convenience they had to serve him with.*

Two remarkable persons met him on the banks of Jordan, that had both of them abused him wretchedly when he was in his flight.

1. Ziba, who had abused him with his fair tongue, and, by accusing his master, had obtained from the king a grant of his estate, *chap. xvi. 4.* A greater abuse he could not have done him, than, by imposing upon his credulity, to draw him in to do a thing so ungrateful to the remains of his friend Jonathan. He comes now with a retinue of sons and servants to meet the king, *ver. 17.* that he might obtain the king's favour, and so come off the better, when Mephibosheth would shortly undeceive him, and clear himself, *ver. 26.*

2. Shimei, who had abused him with his foul tongue, railed at him, and cursed him, *chap. xvi. 5.* If David had gone by the worst, no doubt he would have continued to trample upon him, and have gloried in what he had done; but now he sees him coming home in triumph, and returning to his throne, he thinks it his interest to make his peace with him. Those who now slight and abuse the son of David, would be glad to do so when he shall come in his glory, but it will be too late. Shimei, to recommend himself to the king, 1. Came with good company, with the men of Judah, as one intire in their interest. 2. He brought a regiment of the men of Benjamin with him, a thousand, of which, perhaps, he was chiliarch, or commander in chief, offering his own and their service to the king; or, perhaps, they were volunteers, whom, by his interest, he had got together to meet the king, which was the more obliging, because there were none but these of all the tribes of Israel that appeared to pay him this respect, but Judah only. 3. What he did he hastened to do; he lost no time, *Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way.*

Here is, 1. The criminal's submission, *ver. 19, 20.* He fell down before the king, as a penitent, as a suppliant, and, that he might be thought sincere, he did it publicly before all David's servants, and his friends the men of Judah, yea, and before his own thousand. The offence was publick, therefore the submission ought to be so. He owns his crime, *Thy servant doth know that I have sinned*; he aggravates it, *I did perversly*; he begs the king's pardon, *let not the king impute iniquity to thy servant*, i. e. deal with me as I deserve: he intimates, that it was below the king's great and generous mind to take it to his heart; and pleads his early return to his allegiance, that he was the first of all the house of Joseph, (i. e. of Israel, who, in the beginning of David's reign, had distinguished themselves from Judah, by their adherence to Ishbosheth, *chap. ii. 10.*) that came to meet the king. He came first, that by his example of duty the rest might be induced, and by his experience of the king's clemency, the rest might be encouraged to follow.

2. A motion made for judgment against him, *ver. 21. Shall not Shimei be put to death*, for a traitor? Let him of all men be made an example. Abishai moved it, who would have ventured his life to have been his death, then when he was cursing, *chap. xvi. 9.* David did not think fit to have it done then, because his judicial power was cut short, but now it was restored, why should not the law have its course? Abishai herein consulted David's honour, more than his true interest. Princes have need to arm themselves against temptations to severity.

3. His discharge by the king's order, *ver. 22, 23.* He rejected Abishai's motions with displeasure; *What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah?* The less we have to do with those that are of an

angry revengeful spirit, and that put us upon doing what is harsh and rigorous, the better. He looks upon these prosecutors as *adversaries to him*, though they pretended friendship and zeal for his honour. Those who put us upon doing any ill thing, are really satans, adversaries to us. They were adversaries, 1. To his inclination, which was to clemency. He knew that *he was this day king in Israel*, restored to, and re-established in, his kingdom, and therefore his honour inclined him to forgive. It is the glory of kings to forgive those that humble and surrender themselves: *Sati est praevaluisse leoni.* His joy inclined him to forgive, the pleasantness of his spirit, on this great occasion, forbade the entrance of any thing that was sour and peevish: joyful days should be forgiving days. Yet this was not all, his experience of God's mercy in restoring him to his kingdom, from which he knew it was for his sin that he was excluded, inclined him to shew mercy to Shimei. They that are forgiven must forgive. David had severely revenged the abuses done to his ambassadors by the Ammonites, *chap. xii. 31.* but easily passeth by the abuse done to himself by an Israelite. That was an affront to Israel in general, and touched the honour of his crown and kingdom, this was purely personal, and therefore (according to the usual disposition of good men) he could the easier forgive it. 2. They were adversaries to his interest: if he should put Shimei to death, who cursed him, they would expect the like treatment who had taken up arms, and actually levied war against him, which would drive them from him, while he was endeavouring to draw them to him. Acts of severity are seldom acts of policy: *The throne is established by mercy.* Shimei hereupon has his pardon signed and sealed with an oath; yet bound, no doubt, to his good behaviour, and liable to be prosecuted if he afterwards miscarried himself; and thus he was reserved to be, in due time, as much a monument of the justice of the government, as he was now of its clemency, and in both of its prudence.

24. ¶ And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king: and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed, until the day he came again in peace. 25. And it came to pass when he was come to Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said unto him, Wherefore wentest not thou with me, Mephibosheth? 26. And he answered, My lord, O king, my servant deceived me; for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king, because thy servant is lame. 27. And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king; but my lord the king is as an angel of God: do therefore what is good in thine eyes. 28. For all of my fathers house, were but dead men before my lord the king: yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table: what right therefore have I yet to cry any more unto the king? 29. And the king said unto him, Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land. 30. And Mephibosheth said unto the king, Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house.

The day of David's return was a day of bringing to remembrance, a day of account, in which what had past in his flight was called over again, and, among other things, after Shimei's, comes Mephibosheth's case to be enquired into, and he himself brings it on.

1. He went down in the crowd to meet the king, *ver. 24.* and, as a proof of the sincerity of his joy in the king's return, we are here told what a true mourner he was for the king's banishment. During that melancholy time, when one of the greatest glories of Israel was departed, Mephibosheth continued in a very melancholy posture. He was never trimmed, nor put on clean linen, but wholly neglected himself, as one abandoned to grief for the king's affliction, and the kingdom's misery. In times of publick calamity, we ought to abridge our selves of the delights of sense, in conformity to the season. There are times when God calls to weeping and mourning, and we must comply with the call.

2. When the king came to Jerusalem, since he could not sooner have an opportunity of addressing himself to him, he made his appearance before him, *ver. 25.* And when the king asked him, why he being one of his family had stayed behind, and not accompanied him in his exile, he opened his case fully to the king. 1. He complains of Ziba, his servant, that should have been his friend, but had been two ways his enemy; for he had first balked him of his purpose to go along with the king, and took the ass himself which he was ordered to make ready for his master, *ver. 26.* basely taking advantage of his lameness, and his inability to help himself; and then accused him to David of a design to usurp the government, *ver. 27.* What a great deal of mischief is it in the power of a wicked servant to do to the best master. 2. He gratefully acknowledgeth the king's great kindness to himself, when he and all his father's house lay at the king's mercy, *ver. 28.* when he

he might justly have been dealt with as a rebel, he was treated as a friend, as a child: *Thou didst set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table.* This shews Ziba's suggestion improbable: for could Mephibosheth be so foolish as to aim higher, when he lived so easily, so happily as he did? and could he be so very disingenuous as to design any ill to David, of whose great kindness to him he was thus sensible? 3. He refers himself to the king's pleasure, *do what is good in thine eyes* with me and my estate; depending on the king's wisdom, and his ability to discern between truth and falsehood; *my lord the king is as an angel of God*; and disclaiming all pretensions of his own merit; so much kindness I have received above what I deserved, and *what right have I to cry any more unto the king?* Why should I trouble the king with my complaints, who have already been so troublesome to him? Why should I think any thing hard that is put upon me, who have hitherto been so kindly treated? We were all *as dead men before God*, yet he has not only spared us, but *taken us to sit at his table*; what little reason then have we to complain of any trouble we are in! and what good reason to take all well that God doth!

3. David hereupon recalls the sequestration of Mephibosheth's estate, being deceived in his grant, he revokes it, and confirms his former settlement of it, *I have said, thou and Ziba divide the land*; ver. 29. *i. e.* let it be as I first ordered it, chap. ix. 10. the property shall still be vested in thee, but Ziba shall have the occupancy, he shall till the land, paying thee a rent. Thus Mephibosheth is where he was, no harm is done, only Ziba goes away unpunished, for his false and malicious information against his master, but David either feared him too much, or loved him too well, to do justice upon him according to that law, *Deut. xviii. 18, 19.* and he was now in the humour of forgiving, and resolved to make every body easy.

4. Mephibosheth drowns all his cares about his estate, in his joy for the king's return, ver. 30. *Yea, let him take all*, the presence and favour of the king shall be to me instead of all. A good man can contentedly bear his own private losses and disappointments, while he sees Israel in peace, and the throne of the son of David exalted and established. Ziba take all, so that David may be in peace.

31. ¶ And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim, and went over Jordan with the king, to conduct him over Jordan. 32. Now Barzillai was a very aged man, *even fourscore years old*, and he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim: for he *was* a very great man. 33. And the king said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem. 34. And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? 35. *I am* this day fourscore years old: *and* can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat, or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing-men and singing-women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? 36. Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? 37. Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, *and be buried* by the grave of my father, and of my mother: but behold thy servant Chimham, let him go over with my lord the king, and do to him what shall seem good unto thee. 38. And the king answered, Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good unto thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of me, *that* will I do for thee. 39. And all the people went over Jordan: and when the king was come over, the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place.

David had already graced the triumphs of his restoration with the generous remission of the injuries that had been done him; we have him here gracing them with the no less generous reward of the kindnesses that had been shewn him. Barzillai, the Gileadite, who had a noble feat at Rogelim, not far from Mahanaim, was the man that of all the nobility and gentry of that country had been most kind to David in his distress. If Absalom had prevailed, it is likely, he might have suffered for it, but now he and his shall be no losers by it.

Here is, 1. Barzillai's great respect to David, not only as a good man, but as his rightful sovereign. He *provided him with sustenance*, for himself and his family, *while he lay at Mahanaim*, ver. 32. God had given him a large estate, *for he was a very great man*, and, it seems, he had a large heart to do good with it, and what else but that is a large estate good for? To reduced greatness, generosity obligeth us, and to oppressed goodness, piety obligeth us to be in a particular manner kind to the utmost of our power. Barzillai, to shew that he was not weary of David, though he was so great a charge to him, attended him to Jordan, and went over with him, ver. 31. Let subjects learn hence, to render *tribute to whom tribute is due*, and *honour to whom honour*, Rom. xiii. 7.

2. The kind invitation David gave him to court, ver. 33. *Come thou over with me.* He invited him, 1. That he might have the pleasure of his company, and the benefit of his counsel; for we may suppose he was very wise and good, as well as very rich, else he had not been called here a *very great man*, for it is what a man is, more than what he has, that speaks him truly great. 2. That he might have an opportunity of returning his kindnesses. *I will feed thee with me*, thou shalt fare as sumptuously as I fare, and this at Jerusalem, the royal and holy city. David did not take Barzillai's kindness to him as a due debt, he was none of those arbitrary princes, that think whatever their subjects have is theirs when they please, but accepted it, and rewarded it as a favour. We must always study to be grateful to our friends, especially to those who have helped us in distress.

3. Barzillai's reply to this invitation, wherein, 1. He admires the king's generosity in making him this offer, lessening this service, and magnifying the king's return for it; *Why should the king recompense it with such a reward?* ver. 36. Will the master thank that servant, who only doth what was his duty to do? He thought he had done himself honour enough in doing the king any service. Thus when the saints shall be called to inherit the kingdom, in consideration of what they have done for Christ in this world, they will be amazed at the disproportion between the service and the recompence, *Matt. xxv. 37. Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee?*

2. He declines accepting the invitation, begs his majesty's pardon for refusing so generous an offer: he should think himself very happy in being near the king, but, 1. He is old, and unfit to remove at all, especially to court: old and unfit for the business of the court; *why should I go up with the king to Jerusalem?* I can do him no service there, either in council, or camp, in the treasury, or in the courts of justice; *for how long have I to live?* ver. 34. Shall I think of going into business, now I am going out of the world? Old and unfit for the diversions of the court, which will be ill bestowed, and even thrown away upon one that can relish them so little, ver. 35. As it was in Moses's time, so it was in Barzillai's, and it is not worse now, that *if men be so strong that they come to fourscore years, their strength then is labour and sorrow*, Psalm xc. 10. these were then, and are still, years of which men say they *have no pleasure in them*, Eccl. xii. 1. Dainties are insipid, when desire fails; and songs to the aged ear are little better than those sung to a heavy heart, very disagreeable; how should they choose, when the daughters of mulek are brought low. Let those that are old, learn of this good old gentleman to be dead to the delights of sense; let grace second nature, and make a virtue of the necessity. Nay, Barzillai, being old, thinks he shall be *a burden to the king*, rather than any credit to him; and a good man would not go any where to be burthensome, or, if he must be so, will rather be so to his own house than to another's. 2. He is dying, and must begin to think of his long journey, his removal out of the world for good and all, ver. 37. It is good for us all, but it especially becomes old people, to think and speak much of dying. Talk of going to court, saith Barzillai, let me go home and *die in my own city*, the place of my father's sepulchre; let me die *by the grave of my father*, that my bones may, with a little ado, be carried to the place of their rest. The grave is ready for me, let me go and get ready for it, go and die in my nest.

3. He desires the king to be kind to his son Chimham; *let him go over with my lord the king*, and have preferment at court, what favour is done to him, Barzillai will take as done to himself. They that are old must not grudge young people those delights, which they themselves are past the enjoyment of, nor oblige them to their retirements. Barzillai will go back himself, but he will not make Chimham go back with him, though he could ill be without him, yet, for his satisfaction and improvement, he is willing to spare him.

4. David's farewell to Barzillai. 1. He sends him back into his country with a kiss and a blessing, ver. 39. signifying, that, in gratitude for his kindnesses, he would love him, and pray for him; and with a promise, that whatever request he should at any time make to him, he would be ready to oblige him, ver. 38. *Whatsoever thou shalt think of*, when thou comest home, to ask of me, *that* will I do for thee. What other excellency is there in power, but that it gives men a capacity of doing the more good? 2. He takes Chimham forward with him, and leaves it to Barzillai to choose him his preferment, *I will do to him what shall seem good unto thee*, ver. 38. And, it should seem, Barzillai, who had experienced the innocency and safety of retirement, begged a country seat for him near Jerusalem; but not in it, for long after we read of a place near Beth-lehem, David's city, which is called, The habitation of Chimham, probably, allotted him not out of the crown lands, or the forfeited estates, but David's paternal estate.

40. Then the king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him: and all the people of Judah conducted the king, and also half the people of Israel. 41. ¶ And behold, all the men of Israel came to the king, and said unto the king, Why have our brethren the men of Judah, stolen thee away, and have brought the king and his household, and all David's men with him over Jordan? 42. And all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, Because the king is near of kin to us: where-

fore then be ye angry for this matter? have we eaten at all of the king's cost? or hath he given us any gift? 43. And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more right in David than ye: why then did ye despise us, that our advice should not be first had in bringing back our king? And the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

David came over Jordan attended and assisted by the men of Judah, but by that time he was advanced as far as Gilgal, the first stage on this side Jordan, *half the people of Israel*, i. e. of their elders and great men, were come to wait upon him, to kiss his hand, and congratulate his return, but found they came too late to the solemnity of his first entrance. This put them out of humour, and occasioned a quarrel between them and the men of Judah, which was a damp to the joy of the day, and the beginning of further mischief.

Here is, 1. The complaint which the men of Israel brought to the king against the men of Judah, *ver. 41.* that they had performed the ceremony of bringing the king over Jordan, and not given them notice that they might have come to join in it. This reflected upon them, as if they were not so well affected to the king and his restoration as the men of Judah were, whereas the king himself knew they had spoke of it, before the men of Judah thought of it, *ver. 11.* It seemed likewise as if they intended to monopolize the king's favours when he was come back, and to be looked upon as his only friends. See what mischief comes from pride and jealousy.

2. The excuse which the men of Judah made for themselves, *ver. 42.* 1. They plead relation to the king; *he is near of kin to us*, and therefore in a matter of meer ceremony, as this was, we may claim precedency. It was into our country that he was to be brought, and therefore who so fit as we to bring him? 2. They deny the insinuated charge of self-seeking in what they had done. *Have we eaten at all of the king's cost? No, we have all born our own charges; Hath he given us any gift? No, we have no design to engross the advantages of his return, you are come time enough to share in them.* Too many that attend princes, do it only for what they can get.

3. The men of Israel's vindication of their charge, *ver. 43.* They pleaded, *we have ten parts in the king*, (Judah having Simeon only, whose lot lay within his, to join with him) and therefore it is a slight upon us, that our advice was not asked about bringing back the king. See how uncertain the multitude is; they were lately striving against the king, to drive him out; now they are striving about him, which shall honour him most: a good man and a good cause will thus recover their credit and interest, though for a time they may seem to have lost it. See what is commonly the original of strife, nothing so much as impatience of contempt, or the least seeming slight. The men of Judah had done better, if they had taken their brethren's advice and assistance, but since they did not, why should the men of Israel take it so heinously. If a good work be done, and well done, let not us be displeased, nor the work disparaged, though we had no hand in it.

Lastly, The scripture takes notice, by way of blame, which of the contending parties managed the cause with most passion: *The words of the men of Judah were fiercer than those of the men of Israel.* Though we have right and reason on our side, if we speak it with fierceness, God takes notice of it, and is much displeased with it.

C H A P. XX.

How do the clouds return after the rain! No sooner is one of David's troubles over, but another arises as it were out of the ashes of the former, wherein the threatening is fulfilled, that the sword should never depart from his house. 1. Before he reaches Jerusalem a new rebellion is raised by Sheba, *ver. 1, 2.* 2. His first work, when he comes to Jerusalem, is to condemn his concubines to perpetual imprisonment, *ver. 3.* 3. Amasa, whom he intrusts to raise an army against Sheba, is too slow in his motions, which puts him into a fright, *ver. 4—6.* 4. One of his generals barbarously murders the other, when they were taking the field, *ver. 7—13.* 5. Sheba is at length shut up in the city of Abel, *ver. 14, 15.* but the citizens delivered him up to Joab, and so his rebellion was crushed, *ver. 16—21.* The chapter concludes with a short account of David's great officers, *ver. 23—26.*

1. **A**N D there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba the son of Bichri, a Benjamite, and he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel. 2. So every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri: but the men of Judah clave unto their king, from Jordan even to Jerusalem. 3. ¶ And David came to his house at Jerusalem, and the king took the ten women his concubines, whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in ward, and fed them,

but went not in unto them: so they were shut up unto the day of their death, living in widowhood.

David, in the midst of his triumphs, hath here the affliction to see his kingdom disturbed, and his family disgraced.

1. His subjects revolting from him at the instigation of a man of Belial, whom they followed when they forsook the man after God's own heart. Observe, 1. That this happened immediately upon the crushing of Absalom's rebellion. We must not think it strange, while we are here in this world, if the end of one trouble be the beginning of another: deep sometimes calls unto deep. 2. That the people were now just returning to their allegiance, when of a sudden they flew off from it. When a reconciliation is newly made, it ought to be handled with great tenderness and caution, lest the peace break again before it be settled. A broken bone, when it is set, must have time to knit. 3. That the ring leader of this rebellion was Sheba, a Benjamite by birth, *ver. 1.* but had his habitation in mount Ephraim, *ver. 21.* Shimei and he were both of Saul's tribe, and both retained the ancient grudge of that house. Against the kingdom of the Messiah there is an hereditary enmity in the serpent's seed, and a succession of attempts to overthrow it, *Psalms ii. 1, 2.* But he that sits in heaven laughs at them all. 4. That the occasion of it was that foolish quarrel which we read of in the close of the foregoing chapter, between the elders of Israel, and the elders of Judah, about bringing the king back. It was a point of honour that was disputed between them, which had most interest in David; we are more numerous say the elders of Israel; we are nearer akin to him, say the elders of Judah. Now one would think David very safe and happy, when his subjects are striving which shall love him best, and be most forward to shew him respect, yet even that strife proves the occasion of a rebellion. The men of Israel complained to David of the slight which the men of Judah had put upon them; if he had now countenanced their complaint, commended their zeal, and returned them thanks for it, he might have confirmed them in his interest; but he seemed partial to his own tribe; *their words prevailed above the words of the men of Israel*; as some read the last words of the foregoing chapter: David inclined to justify them; which when the men of Israel perceived, they flew off with indignation; if the king will suffer himself to be engrossed by the men of Judah, let him and them make their best of one another, and we will set up one for ourselves. We thought we had had ten parts in David, but that will not be allowed us, the men of Judah tell us, in effect, *we have no part in him*, and therefore we will have none, nor will we attend him any further in his return to Jerusalem, nor own him for our king. This Sheba proclaimed, *ver. 1.* who probably was a man of note, and had been active in Absalom's rebellion; the disgusted Israelites took the hint, and went up from after David, to follow Sheba, *ver. 2.* i. e. the generality of them did so, only the men of Judah stuck to him.

Learn hence, 1. That it is impolitical for princes to be partial in their respects to their subjects, as it is for parents to be so to their children; both should carry it with an even hand. 2. Those know not what they do that make light of the affections of their inferiors, or that are wanting to countenance and accept of them. Their hatred may be feared, whose love is despised. 3. *The beginning of strife is as the letting forth of water*; it is therefore wisdom to leave it off before it be meddled with, *Prov. xvii. 14.* How great a matter doth a little of this fire kindle! 4. The perverting of words is the subverting of peace; and a deal of mischief is made by forcing invidious constructions upon what is said and written, and drawing consequences that were never intended. The men of Judah said, *The king is near of kin to us*, by which, say the men of Israel, you mean, *we have no part in him*; whereas they meant no such thing. 5. People are very apt to run into extremes, *We have ten parts in David*, said they, and almost in the next breath, *we have no part in him.* To day hosanna, to morrow crucify.

2. His concubines shut up, and imprisoned for life, and he himself under a necessity of doing it, because they had been defiled by Absalom, *ver. 3.* David had multiplied wives contrary to the law, and they proved a grief and shame to him. Those whom he had sinfully taken pleasure in, he was now, 1. Obligated in duty to put away, they being rendred unclean to him, by the vile uncleanness his son had committed with them. They whom he had loved, must now be lothed. 2. Obligated in prudence to shut up, in privacy, not to be seen abroad for shame, lest the sight of them should give occasion to people to speak of what Absalom had done to them, which ought not to be so much as named, *1 Cor. v. 1.* That that villainy might be buried in oblivion, they must be buried in obscurity. 3. Obligated in justice to shut up in prison, to punish them for their easy submission to Absalom's lust, despairing, perhaps, of David's return, and giving him up for gone. Let none expect to do ill, and fare well.

4. ¶ Then said the king to Amasa, assemble me the men of Judah within three days, and be thou here present. 5. So Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah; but he tarried longer than the set time which he had appointed him. 6. And David said to Abishai, Now shall Sheba the son of Bichri do us more harm than did Absalom: take thou thy lords servants and pursue after him, lest he

he get him fenced cities; and escape us: 7. And there went out after him Joabs men; and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men: and they went out of Jerusalem, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri. 8. When they *were* at the great stone which *is* in Gibeon, Amasa went before them: and Joabs garment that he had put on was girded unto him, and upon it a girdle *with* a sword fastned upon his loins in the sheath thereof, and as he went forth it fell out: 9. And Joab said to Amasa, *Art thou in health, my brother?* And Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him. 10. But Amasa took no heed to the sword that *was* in Joabs hand: so he smote him therewith in the fifth *rib*, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and strook him not again, and he died: so Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri. 11. And one of Joabs men stood by him, and said, he that favoureth Joab, and he that *is* for David, *let him go* after Joab. 12. And Amasa wallowed in blood in the midst of the highway: and when the man saw that all the people stood still, he removed Amasa out of the highway into the field, and cast a cloth upon him, when he saw that every one that came by him, stood still. 13. When he was removed out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri.

We have here Amasa's fall just as he begun to rise. He was nephew to David, *chap. xvii. 25.* had been Absalom's general, and commander in chief of his rebellious army: But that being routed, he came over into David's interest, upon a promise that he should be general of his forces instead of Joab. Sheba's rebellion gives David an occasion to make good that promise sooner than he could wish, but Joab's envy and emulation made it of ill consequence, both to him and David.

1. Amasa has a commission to raise forces for the suppressing of Sheba's rebellion, and is ordered to do it with all possible expedition, *ver. 4.* It seems the men of Judah, though forward to attend the king's triumphs, were backward enough to fight his battles, else, when they were all in a body waiting upon him to Jerusalem, they might immediately have pursued Sheba, and have crushed that cockatrice in the egg, but most love a loyalty, as well as a religion, that is cheap and easy. Many boast of their being akin to Christ, that yet are very loth to venture for him, Amasa is sent to assemble the men of Judah within three days; but he finds them so backward and unready, that he cannot do it within the time appointed, *ver. 5.* though the preferring Amasa, who had been their general under Absalom, was very obliging, and a proof of the clemency of David's government.

2. Upon Amasa's delay, Abishai, the brother of Joab is ordered to take the guards, and standing forces, and with them to pursue Sheba, *ver. 6; 7.* for nothing could be of more dangerous consequence than to give him time. David gives these orders to Abishai, because he resolves to mortify Joab, and degrade him, not so much, I doubt, for the blood of Abner, which he had shed basely, as for the blood of Absalom which he had shed justly, and honourably. "Now (saith bishop Hall) Joab smarteth for a loyal disobedience; how slippery are the stations of earthly honours, and subject to continual mutability! Happy are they who are in favour with him, in whom there is no shadow of change." Joab, without orders, though in disgrace, goes along with his brother, knowing he might be serviceable to the publick, or, perhaps, now meditating the removal of his rival.

3. Joab, near Gibeon, meets with Amasa, and barbarously murders him, *ver. 8, 9, 10.* It should seem, the great stone in Gibeon was the place appointed for the rendezvous, there the rivals met; and Amasa, relying upon his commission, went before, as general both of the new raised forces which he had got together, and of the veteran troops which Abishai had brought in; but Joab there took an opportunity to kill him with his own hand; and, 1. He did it subtilly, and with contrivance, and not upon a sudden provocation. He girts his coat about him, that that might not hang in his way, and girt his belt upon his coat, that his sword might be the readier to him; he put his sword in a sheath too big for it, that whenever he pleased, it might upon a little shake, fall out, as if it fell by accident, and so he might take it into his hand unsuspected, as if he were going to return it into the scabbard, when he designed to sheath it in the bowels of Amasa. The more there is of plot in a sin, the worse it is. 2. He did it treacherously, and under pretence of friendship, that Amasa might not be upon his guard. He called him brother, for they were own cousins, enquired of his welfare, *Art thou in health?* took him by the beard, as one he was free with, to kiss him, while, with the drawn sword in his other hand, he was aiming at his heart. Was this done like a gentleman, like a soldier, like a general? No, but like a villain, like a base coward. Just thus he slew Abner, and went unpunished for it, which encouraged him to do the like again. 3. He did it impudently, not in a corner, but at the head of his troops, and in

their sight, as one that was neither ashamed nor afraid to do it; that was so hardened in blood and murders, that he could neither blush, nor tremble. 4. He did it at one blow, gave the fatal push with a good will, as we say, so that he needed not strike him again; with such a strong and steady hand he gave this one stroke that it did his business. 5. He did it in contempt and defiance of David, and the commission he had given to Amasa; for that commission was the only ground of his quarrel with him, so that David was struck at through the side of Amasa, and was, in effect, told to his face, that Joab would be general in spite of him. 6. He did it very unseasonably, when they were going against a common enemy, and were concerned to be unanimous. This ill-timed quarrel might have scattered their forces, or engaged them one against another, and so have made them all an easy prey to Sheba. So contentedly could Joab sacrifice the interest both of king and kingdom to his personal revenges.

4. Joab immediately resumes his general's place, and takes care to lead the army on in pursuit of Sheba, that, if possible, he might prevent any prejudice to the common cause, by what he had done. 1. He leaves one of his men to make proclamation to the forces that were coming up, that they were still engaged in David's cause, but under Joab's command, *ver. 11.* He knew what an interest he had in the soldiery, and how many favoured him, rather than Amasa that had been a traitor, was now a turn-coat, and had never been successful; on this he boldly relied, and called them all to follow him: What man of Judah would not be for his old king, and his old general. But one would wonder with what face a murderer could pursue a traitor; and how under such a heavy load of guilt he had courage to enter upon danger; his conscience sure was seared with a hot iron. 2. Care is taken to remove the dead body out of the way, because at that they made a stand, (as *chap. ii. 23.*) and to cover it with a cloth, *ver. 12, 13.* Wicked men think themselves safe in their wickedness, if they can but conceal it from the eye of the world: if it be hid, it is with them as if it were never done. But the covering of blood with a cloth, cannot stop its cry in God's ear for vengeance, or make it the less loud. However, since this was no time to arraign Joab for what he had done; and the common safety called for expedition, it was prudently done to remove that which retarded the march of the army; and then they all went on after Joab, while David, who, no doubt, had notice soon brought him of this tragedy, could not but reflect upon it with regret, that he had not formerly done justice on Joab, for the death of Abner; and that he had now exposed Amasa by preferring him: And, perhaps, his conscience minded him of his employing Joab in the murder of Uriah, which had helped to harden him in cruelty.

14. And he went through all the tribes of Israel unto Abel, and to Beth-maachah, and all the Berites, and they were gathered together, and went also after him. 15. And they came and besieged him in Abel of Beth-maachah, and they cast up a bank against the city, and it stood in the trench: and all the people that *were* with Joab battered the wall, to throw it down. 16. ¶ Then cried a wise woman out of the city, Hear, hear, say, I pray you, unto Joab, Come near hither that I may speak with thee. 17. And when he was come near unto her, the woman said, *Art thou Joab?* And he answered, *I am he.* Then she said unto him, Hear the words of thine handmaid. And he answered, I do hear. 18. Then she spake, saying, They were wont to speak in old time, saying, They shall surely ask *counsel* at Abel: and so they ended *the matter.* 19. *I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel:* thou seekest to destroy a city, and a mother in Israel: why wilt thou swallow up the inheritance of the LORD? 20. And Joab answered and said, Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy. 21. The matter is not so: but a man of mount Ephraim (Sheba the son of Bichri by name) hath lift up his hand against the king, *even against David:* deliver him only, and I will depart from the city. And the woman said unto Joab, Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee over the wall. 22. Then the woman went unto all the people in her wisdom, and they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and cast it out to Joab: and he blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city, every man to his tent: and Joab returned to Jerusalem unto the king.

We have here the conclusion of Sheba's attempt.

1. The rebel when he had rambled over all the tribes of Israel, and found them not so willing, upon second thoughts, to follow him, as they had been upon a sudden provocation to desert David, but had only picked up some few like himself that sided with him, nestled at length in Abel Beth-maachah, a strong city in the north, in the lot of Nephthali, where we find it placed, *2 Kings xv. 29.* Here he took shelter, whether by force or with consent doth not ap-

pear; but his adherents were mostly Berites, of Beeroth in Benjamin, *ver.* 14. One ill man will find or make more.

2. Joab drew up all his force against the city, besieged it, battered the wall, and made it almost ready for a general storm, *ver.* 15. Justly is that place attacked with all this fury which dares harbour a traitor; nor will that heart fare better which indulgeth those rebellious lusts, that will not have Christ to reign over them.

3. A discreet good woman of the city of Abel, brings this matter, by her prudent management, to a good issue, so as to satisfy Joab, and yet save the city. Here is,

1. Her treaty with Joab, and her capitulation with him, by which he is engaged to raise the siege, upon condition, that Sheba be delivered up. It seems none of all the men of Abel, none of the elders or magistrates offered to treat with Joab, no, not when they were reduced to the last extremity; either they were stupid, and unconcerned for the publick safety, or they stood in awe of Sheba, or they despaired of gaining any good terms with Joab, or they had not wit enough to manage the treaty: But this one woman with her wisdom saved the city: Souls know no differences of sexes; though the man be the head, it doth not therefore follow, that he has the monopoly of the brains, and therefore ought not by any falique law, to have the monopoly of the crown; many a masculine heart, and more than masculine has been found in a female breast; nor is the treasure of wisdom the less valuable for being lodged in the weaker vessel.

In this treaty between this nameless heroine and Joab,

1. She gains his audience and attention, *ver.* 16, 17. and we may suppose it was the first time he had ever treated with a woman in martial affairs.

2. She reasons with him on behalf of her city, and very ingeniously. 1. That it was a city famous for wisdom, *ver.* 18. as we translate it, she pleads that this city had been long in such reputation for prudent knowing men, that it was the common referee of the country, and all agreed to abide by the award of its elders. Their sentence was an oracle, let them be consulted, and the matter is ended, all sides will acquiesce. Now, shall such a city as this be laid in ashes, and never treated with? 2. That the inhabitants were generally peaceable and faithful in Israel, *ver.* 19. She could speak not for her self only, but for all those whose cause she pleaded, that they were not of turbulent and seditious spirits, but of known fidelity to their prince, and peaceableness with their fellow-subjects; neither seditious, nor litigious. 3. That it was a mother in Israel, a guide and nurse to the towns and country about; and that it was a part of the inheritance of the Lord, a city of Israelites, not of heathen; and the destruction of it would lessen and weaken that nation, which God had chosen for his heritage. 4. That they expected him to offer them peace, before he made an attack upon them, according to that known law of war: *Deut.* xx. 10. So the margin reads, *ver.* 18. they plainly speak in the beginning (*viz.* of the siege) saying, surely they will ask of Abel, *i. e.* The besiegers will demand the traitor, and will ask to surrender him, and if they do, we will soon come to an agreement, and so end the matter. Thus she tacitly upbraids Joab for not offering them peace, but hopes it is not too late to beg it.

3. Joab and Abel's advocate soon agree the matter, that Sheba's head shall be the ransom of the city. Joab, though in a personal quarrel, he had lately swallowed up and destroyed Amasa, yet when he acts as a general, will by no means bear the imputation, *Far be it from me that I should delight to swallow up or destroy*, or design it, but when it is necessary for the publick safety, *ver.* 20. the matter is not so, our quarrel is not with your city, we would hazard our lives for its protection, our quarrel is only with the traitor that harboured among you, deliver him up, and we have done. A great deal of mischief would be prevented, if contending parties would but understand one another. The city obstinately holds out, believing Joab aims at its ruin; Joab furiously attacks it, believing the citizens all confederates with Sheba; whereas it is neither so nor so, let both sides be undeceived, and the matter is soon accommodated. The single condition of peace, is the surrender of the traitor; it is so in God's dealing with the soul, when it is besieged by convictions and distresses; sin is the traitor; the beloved lust is the rebel: part with that, cast away the transgressions, and all shall be well. No peace on any other terms. Our wife woman immediately agrees to the proposal; *Behold his head shall be thrown to thee presently.*

2. Her treaty with the citizens, she went to them in her wisdom, (and, perhaps, she had as much need of it in dealing with them, as in dealing with Joab) and persuaded them to cut off Sheba's head, probably by some publick order of their government, and it was thrown over the wall to Joab: He knew the traitor's face, and therefore looked no further, intending not that any of his adherents should suffer. The publick safety was secured, and then no matter for gratifying the publick revenge. Joab hereupon raised the siege, and marched back to Jerusalem, with the trophies, rather of peace than victory.

23. ¶ Now Joab was over all the host of Israel: and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites, and over the Pelethites: 14. And Adoram was over the tribute: and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was re-

corder: 25. And Sheva was scribe: and Zadok and Abiathar were the priests: 26. And Ira also the Jairite was a chief ruler about David.

Here is an account of the state of David's court after his restoration. Joab was continued general, being too big to be displaced. Benaiah, as before, captain of the guards. Here is one new office erected, which we had not, *chap.* viii. 16. that of treasurer, or one over the tribute, for it was not till towards the latter end of his time, that he began to raise taxes. Adoram was long in this office, but it cost him his life at last, 1 *Kin.* xii. 18.

C H A P. XXI.

The date of the events of this chapter is uncertain. I incline to think that they happened as they are here placed, after Absalom's and Sheba's rebellion, and towards the latter end of David's reign. That the battles with the Philistines mentioned here, were long after the Philistines were subdued, appears by comparing, 1 Chron. xviii. 1. with cap. xx. 4. The numbring of the people was just before the firing of the place of the temple, as appears, 1 Chron. xxii. 1. and that was towards the close of David's life, and it should seem the people were numbred just after the three years famine for the Gibeonites, for that which is threatened, as three years famine, 1. Chron. xxi. 12. is called seven years, 2 Sam. xxiv. 13. ver. 12. Three more with the year current added to those three. We have here (1.) The Gibeonites revenged, (1.) By a famine in the land, ver. 1. (2.) By the putting of seven of Saul's posterity to death, ver. 2,—9. and the care that was taken of their dead bodies, and of the bones of Saul, ver. 10,—14. (2.) The giants of the Philistines slain in several battles, ver. 15,—22.

1. **T**HEN there was a famine in the days of David, three years, year after year; and David enquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, *It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.* 2. And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them, (now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites, and the children of Israel had sworn unto them: and Saul sought to slay them, in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah.) 3. Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the LORD? 4. And the Gibeonites said unto him, We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house, neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel. And he said, What you shall say, that will I do for you. 5. And they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised against us, that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, 6. Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, whom the LORD did choose. And the king said, I will give them. 7. But the king spared Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the LORD's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. 8. But the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare unto Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth, and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite. 9. And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the LORD: and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley-harvest.

Here, 1. We are told of the injury which Saul had long before this done to the Gibeonites, which he had no account of in the history of his reign, nor had heard of here, but that it came now to be reckoned for. The Gibeonites were of the remnant of the Amorites, *ver.* 2. who, by a wile, had made peace with Israel, and had the publick faith pawned to them by Joshua for their safety; we had the story, *Josh.* ix. where it was agreed, *ver.* 23. that they should be secured of their lives, but deprived of their lands and liberties, that they and theirs should be tenants in villenage to Israel. It doth not appear that they had broke their part of the covenant, either by denying their service, or attempting to recover their lands or liberties; nor was it pretended; but Saul, under colour of zeal, for the honour of Israel, that it might not be said they had any of the natives among them, aimed to root them out, and, in order to that, slew many of them. Thus he would seem wiser than his predecessors the judges, and more zealous for the publick interest: And, perhaps, designed it for an instance of his royal prerogative, and the power, which as king, he assumed to rescind the former acts of government, and to disannul the most solemn leagues. It may be he designed by this severity towards the Gibeonites, to atone for his

his clemency towards the Amalekites. Some conjecture that he sought to cut off the Gibeonites at the same time, when he put away the witches, 1 Sam. xxviii. 3. or, perhaps, many of them were remarkably pious, and he sought to destroy them when he slew the priests their masters. That which made this an exceeding sinful sin, was, that he not only shed innocent blood, but therein violated the solemn oath, by which the nation was bound to protect them. See what brought ruin on Saul's house, it was a bloody house.

2. We find the nation of Israel chastised with a sore famine long after, for this sin of Saul. Observe, (1.) Even in the land of Israel, that fruitful land, and in the reign of David, that glorious reign, there was a famine, not extream, for then it would sooner have been taken notice of, and enquiry made into the cause of it, but great drought, and scarcity of provisions, the consequence of it, for three years together. If corn miss one year, commonly the next makes up the deficiency, but if it miss three years successively, it will be a sore judgment, and the man of wisdom, will, by it, hear God's voice crying to the country, to repent of the abuse of plenty. 2. David enquired of God concerning it. Though he was himself a prophet, he must consult the oracle, and know God's mind in his own appointed way. Note, When we are under God's judgments, we ought to enquire into the grounds of the controversy. *Lord, shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.* It is strange David did not sooner consult the oracle, not till the third year, but, perhaps, till then he apprehended it not to be an extraordinary judgment, for some particular sin. And even good men are oft slack and remiss in doing their duty. We continue in ignorance, and under mistake, because we delay to enquire. 3. God was ready in his answer, though David was slow in his enquiries. *It is for Saul.* Note, God's judgments oft look a great way back, which obligeth us to do so, when we are under his rebukes. It is not for us to object against the people's smarting for the sin of their king, perhaps they were aiding and abetting: Nor against this generation's suffering for the sin of the last, God oft *visiteth the sins of the fathers upon the children, and his judgments are a great deep*: He giveth not account of any of his matters. Time doth not wear out the guilt of sin; nor can we build hopes of impunity upon the delay of judgments. There is no statute of limitation to be pleaded against God's demands. *Nullum tempus occurrit Deo.*

3. We have vengeance taken upon the house of Saul, for the turning away of God's wrath from the land, which, at present, smarted for his sin.

1. David, it is probable, by divine direction, referred it to the Gibeonites themselves, to prescribe what satisfaction should be given them, for the wrong that had been done them, *ver. 3.* They had many years remained silent, had not appealed to David, nor given the kingdom any disturbance with their complaints or demands, and now at length God speaks for them, *I heard not, for thou wilt hear,* Psal. xxxviii. 14, 15. and they are recompensed for their patience with this honour, that they are made judges in their own case, and have a blank given them to write their demands on, *what you shall say, that will I do,* *ver. 4.* that atonement may be made, and that *ye may bless the inheritance of the Lord,* *ver. 3.* It is sad for any family or nation to have the prayers of oppressed innocency against them, and therefore the expence of a just restitution is well bestowed for the retrieving of the blessing, of those that were ready to perish, Job xxix. 13. My servant Job whom you have wronged shall pray for you, (saith God) and then I will be reconciled to you, and not till then. Those understand not themselves, that value not the prayers of the poor and despised.

2. They desired that seven of Saul's posterity might be put to death, and David granted them their demand.

1. They required no silver nor gold, *ver. 4.* Note, Money is no satisfaction for blood, see Num. xxxv. 31, 32, 33. It is the ancient law, blood calls for blood, Gen. ix. 6. and those over-value money, and under-value life, that sell the blood of their relations for corruptible things, such as silver and gold. The Gibeonites had now a fair opportunity to get a discharge from their servitude, in compensation for the wrong done them, according to the equity of that law, *Exod. xxi. 26. if a man strike out his servants eye, he shall let him go free for his eyes sake.* But they did not insist on this neither; though the covenant was broke on the other side, it should not be broke on theirs: They were Nethinim given to God, and his people Israel, and they would not seem weary of the service.

2. They required no lives, but of Saul's family; he had done them the wrong, and therefore his children must pay for it. We sue the heirs for the parents debts; men may not extend that so far as life, *Deut. xxiv. 16. The children in an ordinary course of law shall never be put to death for the parents,* but this case of the Gibeonites was altogether extraordinary: God had made himself an immediate party to the cause, and no doubt put it into the heart of the Gibeonites to make this demand, for he owned what was done, *ver. 14.* and his judgments are not subject to the rules which mens judgments must be subject to. Let parents take heed of sin, especially the sin of cruelty and oppression for their poor childrens sake, who may be smarting for it by the just hand of God, when they are in their graves. Guilt and a curse are a bad entail upon a family. It should seem Saul's posterity trod in his steps, for it is called a bloody house, it was the spirit of the family, and therefore they are justly reckoned with for his sin, as well as for their own.

Nº. XXIV.

3. They would not impose it upon David, to do this execution, *thou shalt not for us kill any man,* *ver. 4.* But we will do it our selves, *we will hang them up unto the Lord,* *ver. 5.* that if there were any hardship in it, they might bear the blame, and not David or his house. By our old law, if a murderer had judgment given against him upon an appeal, the relations that appealed, had the executing of him.

4. They did not require this from any ill principle of malice against Saul or his family, had they been revengeful, they would have moved it themselves long before, but from a principle of love to the people of Israel, whom they saw plagued for the injury done to them. *We will hang them up unto the Lord,* *ver. 6.* to satisfy his justice, not to gratify any revenge of our own; for the good of the publick, not for our own reputation.

5. The nomination of the persons they left to David; who took care to secure Mephibosheth for Jonathan's sake, that while he was avenging the breach of one oath, he might not himself break another, *ver. 7.* but he delivered up two of Saul's sons which he had by a concubine of his, and five of his grandsons, whom his Daughter Merab bore to Adriel, 1 Sam. xviii. 19. but his daughter Michal brought up, *ver. 8.* now Saul's treachery was punished in giving Merab to Adriel, when he had promised her to David, with a design to provoke him. "It is a dangerous matter (saith bishop Hail upon this) to offer injury to any of God's faithful ones: if their meekness have easily remitted it, their God will not pass it over without a severe retribution; though it may be long first."

6. The place, time, and manner of their execution, all added to the solemnity of their being sacrificed to divine justice. 1. They were hanged up as anathema's, under a peculiar mark of God's displeasure, for the law had said, *he that is hanged, is accursed of God,* Deut. xxi. 23. Gal. iii. 13. Christ being made a curse for us, and dying to satisfy for our sins, and to turn away the wrath of God, became obedient to this ignominious death. 2. They were hanged up in Gibeah of Saul, *ver. 6.* to shew that it was for his sin that they died. They were hanged as it were before their own door, to expiate the guilt of the house of Saul; and thus God accomplished the ruin of that family, for the blood of the priests, and their families, which, doubtless, now came in remembrance before God, and inquisition was made for it, *Psal. ix. 12.* Yet the blood of the Gibeonites is only mentioned, because that was shed in violation of a sacred oath, which, though sworn long before, though obtained by a wile, and the promise made to Canaanites, yet is thus severely reckoned for: The despising of the oath, and breaking the covenant, will be recompensed on the head of those who thus profane God's sacred name, *Ezek. xvii. 18, 19.* And thus God would shew, that with him rich and poor met together: Even royal blood must go to atone for the blood of Gibeonites, who were but the vassals of the congregation. 3. They were put to death *in the days of harvest,* *ver. 9.* at the beginning of harvest, *ver. 10.* to shew that they were thus sacrificed for the turning away of that wrath of God, which had withheld from them their harvest mercies, for some years past, and to obtain his favour in the present harvest. Thus there is no way of appeasing God's anger, but by mortifying and crucifying our lusts and corruptions. In vain, do we expect mercy from God, unless we do justice upon our sins. Those executions must not be complained of as cruel, which are become necessary to the publick welfare. Better that seven of Saul's bloody house be hanged, than that all Israel be famished.

10. And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest, until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night. 11. And it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul had done. 12. And David went and took the bones of Saul, and the bones of Jonathan his son, from the men of Jabesh-gilead, which had stolen them from the street of Bethshan, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa. 13. And he brought up from thence the bones of Saul, and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged. 14. And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish his father: and they performed that the king commanded: and after that God was intreated for the land.

Here is, 1. Saul's sons not only hanged, but hanged in chains, their dead bodies left hanging, and exposed till the judgment ceased, which their death was to turn away, by the sending of rain upon the land. They died as sacrifices, and thus they were in a manner offered up, not consumed all at once by fire, but gradually by the air. They died as anathema's, and by this ignominious usage, they were represented as execrable, because iniquity was laid upon them. When our blessed Saviour was made sin for us, he was made a curse for us. But how shall we reconcile this with the law, which expressly obliged to *bury those that were hanged the same day?* Deut.

xxi. 23. One of the Jewish Rabbins wished this passage of story were expunged, *that the name of God might be sanctified*, which he thinks is dishonoured, by his acceptance of that which was a violation of his law; but this was an extraordinary case, and did not fall within that law; nay, the very reason for that law, is a reason for this exception: He that is thus left hanged is accursed, therefore ordinary malefactors must not be so abused; but therefore these must; because they were sacrificed not to the justice of the nation, but for the crime of the nation, no less a crime than the violating of the publick faith, and for the deliverance of the nation, from no less a judgment than a general famine. Being thus made as the *off-scouring of all things*, they were made a *spectacle to the world*, 1 Cor. iv. 9, 13. God appointing, or at least allowing it.

2. Their dead bodies watched by Rizpah, the mother of two of them, *ver. 10.* It was a great affliction to her now in her old age to see her sons, who, we may suppose, had been a comfort to her, and were likely to be the support of her declining years, cut off both of them in this dreadful manner. None know what sorrows they are reserved for. She may not see them decently interred, but they shall be decently attended. She attempts not to violate the sentence past upon them, that they should hang there till God sent rain; neither steals nor forces away their dead bodies, though the divine law might have been vouched to bear her out; but patiently submits, pitches a tent of sack-cloth near the gibbets, where, with her servants and friends, she protected the dead bodies from birds and beasts of prey. Thus she did, 1. Indulge her grief, as passionate mourners are too apt to do, to no good purpose. When sorrow in such cases is in danger of growing excessive, we should rather study how to divert and pacify it, than how to humour and gratify it. Why should we thus harden our selves in sorrow? 2. Testify her love. Thus she let the world know that her sons died not for any sin of their own, not as stubborn and rebellious sons, whose eye had despised to obey their mother, if that had been the case, she would have suffered the *ravens of the valley to pick it out*, and the *young eagles to eat it*, Prov. xxx. 17. But they died for their father's sin, and therefore her mind could not be alienated from them by their hard fate. Though there is no remedy but they must die, yet they shall die pitied and lamented.

3. The solemn interment of their dead bodies, with the bones of Saul and Jonathan, in the burying place of their family. David was so far from being displeased at what Rizpah had done, that he was himself stirred up by it to do honour to the house of Saul, and to these branches of it among the rest, that it might appear it was not out of any personal disgust to the family, that he delivered them up, and that he had not desired the woful day, but he was obliged to do it for the publick good. 1. He now bethought himself of removing the bodies of Saul and Jonathan from the place where the men of Jabesh-gilead had decently, but privately and obscurely, interred them *under a tree*, 1 Sam. xxxi. 12, 13. Though the shield of Saul was vilely cast away, as if he had not been anointed with oil, yet let not royal dust be lost in the graves of the common people. Humanity obliges thus to respect human bodies, especially of the great and good, in consideration both of what they have been, and what they are to be. 2. With them he buried the bodies of them that were hanged; for when God's anger was turned away, they were no longer to be looked upon as a curse, *ver. 13, 14.* When *water dropped upon them out of heaven*, *ver. 10. i. e.* when God sent rain to water the earth, (which, perhaps, was not many days after they were hung up) then they were taken down, for then it appeared that *God was intreated for the land*. When justice is done on earth, vengeance from heaven ceaseth. Through Christ, who was hanged on a tree, and so made a curse for us, to expiate our guilt, though he was himself guiltless, God is pacified, and is intreated for us: and it is said, *Acts xiii. 29.* that *when they had fulfilled all that was written of him*, in token of that, and of God's acceptance of it, *they took him down and laid him in a sepulchre*.

15. § Moreover, the Philistines had yet war again with Israel, and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines; and David waxed faint. 16. And Ishbi-benob, which was of the sons of the giant, (the weight of whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of brass in weight) he being girded with a new sword, thought to have slain David. 17. But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succoured him, and smote the Philistine, and killed him. Then the men of David swore unto him, saying, Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel. 18. And it came to pass after this, that there was again a battle with the Philistines at Gob; then Sibbechai the Hushathite slew Saph, which was of the sons of the giant. 19. And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim a Bethlehemite, slew the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weavers beam. 20. And there was yet a battle in Gath, where was a man of great stature, that had on every hand six fingers, and on every

foot six toes, four and twenty in number; and he also was born to the giant. 21. And when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea the brother of David slew him. 22. These four were born to the giant in Gath, and fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants.

We have here the story of some rencounters with the Philistines, which happened, as it should seem, in the latter end of David's reign. Though he had so subdued them that they could not bring any great numbers into the field, yet, as long as they had any giants among them to be their champions, they would never be quiet, but took all occasions to disturb the peace of Israel, to challenge them, or make incursions upon them.

1. David himself was engaged with one of the giants: the Philistines began the war yet again, *ver. 15.* The enemies of God's Israel are restless in their attempts against them. David, though old, desired not a writ of ease from the publick service, but he himself went down in person to fight against the Philistines. *Sensit non significit.* A sign he fought not for his own glory, at this age he was loaded with that, and needed no more, but for the good of his kingdom. But in this engagement, 1. We find him in distress and danger. He thought he could bear the fatigues of war as well as he had done formerly, his will was good, and he hoped he could do as at other times, but he found himself deceived, age had cut his hair, and, after a little toil, he waxed faint. His body could not keep pace with his mind. The champion of the Philistines was soon aware of his advantage, perceived that David's strength failed him, and then, being himself strong and well armed, he thought to have slain David, but God was not in his thoughts, and therefore in that very day they all perished. The enemies of God's people are oft very strong, very subtle, and very sure of success, like Ishbi-benob, but there is no strength, nor counsel, nor confidence against the Lord. 2. Wonderfully rescued by Abishai, who came seasonably in to his relief, *ver. 17.* herein we must own Abishai's courage and fidelity to his prince, to save whose life he bravely ventured his own: but much more the good providence of God, which brought him in to David's succour, in the minute of his extremity. Such a cause and such a champion, though distressed, shall not be deserted. When Abishai succoured him, gave him a cordial, it may be, to relieve his fainting spirits, or appeared as his second, he (*viz.* David, so I understand it) smote the Philistine, and killed him, for it is said, *ver. 22.* David had himself a hand in slaying the giants. David fainted, but he did not flee; though his strength failed him, he bravely kept his ground, and then God sent him this help in the time of need, which, though brought him by his junior and inferior, he thankfully accepted of, and, with a little recruit, gained his point, and came off a conqueror: Christ in his agonies was strengthened by an angel. In spiritual conflicts even strong saints sometimes wax faint; then Satan attacks them furiously; but they that stand their ground and resist him, shall be relieved, and made more than conquerors. 3. David's servants hereupon resolved that he should never expose himself thus any more. They had easily persuaded him not to fight against Absalom, *chap. xviii. 3.* but against the Philistines he would go, till, having had this fair escape, it was resolved in council, and confirmed with an oath, that the light of Israel (its guide and glory, so David was) should never be put again into such hazard of being blown out. Such valuable lives as David's was, ought to be preserved with a double care, both by themselves and others.

2. The rest of the giants fell by the hand of David's servants. 1. Saph was slain by Sibbechai, one of David's worthies, 1 Chron. xi. 29. *ver. 18.* 2. Another, who was brother to Goliath, was slain by Elhanan, who is mentioned *chap. xxiii. 24.* 3. Another, who was of such an unusual bulk, that he had more fingers and toes than other people, *ver. 20.* and such an unparalleled insolence, that though he had seen the fall of other giants, yet defied Israel, was slain by Jonathan the son of Shimea: Shimea had one son named Jonadab, 2 Sam. xiii. 3. I should have taken it for the same with this Jonathan, but that was noted for subtilty, this for bravery. These giants, probably, were the remains of the sons of Anak, who, though long feared, fell at last.

Now observe, 1. It is folly for the strong man to glory in his strength: David's servants were no bigger nor stronger than other men, yet thus, by divine assistance, they mastered one giant after another. God chuseth by the weak things to confound the mighty. 2. It is common for those to go down slain to the pit, who have been the terror of the mighty in the land of the living, Ezek. xxxii. 22. 3. The most powerful enemies are oft reserved for the last encounter. David began his glory with the conquest of one giant, and here concludes it with the conquest of four. Death is a christian's last enemy, and a son of Anak, but through him that triumphed for us, we hope, even over that enemy, to be more than conquerors at last.

C H A P. XXII.

This chapter is a psalm, a psalm of praise; we find it afterwards inserted among David's psalms, No. 18. with some little variation. We have it here as it was first composed for his own closet, and his

own harp, but there we have it as it was afterwards delivered to the chief musician for the service of the church: a second edition with some amendments: for though it was calculated primarily for David's case, yet it might indifferently serve the devotion of others, in giving thanks for their deliverances; or, it was intended that his people should thus join with him in his thanksgivings, because he being a publick person, his deliverances were to be accounted publick blessings, and called for publick acknowledgments. The inspired historian having largely related David's deliverances in this and the foregoing book, and one particularly in the close of the foregoing chapter, thought fit to record this sacred poem as a memorial of all that had been before related. Some think David penned this psalm when he was old, upon a general review of the mercies of his life, and the many wonderful preservations God had blest him with, from first to last. We should in our praises look as far back as we can, and not suffer time to wear out the sense of God's favours. Others think he penned it when he was young, upon occasion of some of his first deliverances, and kept it by him for his after-use, and that upon every new deliverance, his practice was to sing this song. But the book of psalms shews that he varied, as there was occasion, and confined not himself to one form. Here is, 1. The title of the psalm, ver. 1. 2. The psalm it self; in which, with a very warm devotion, and very great fluency and copiousness of expression, (1.) He gives glory to God. (2.) He takes comfort in him, and he finds matter for both. 1. In the experiences he had of God's former favours. 2. In the expectations he had of his further favours. These are intermixed throughout the whole psalm.

1. **A**ND David spake unto the LORD the words of this song, in the day that the LORD had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul.

Observe here, 1. That it has oft been the lot of God's people to have many enemies, and to be in imminent danger of falling into their hands. David was a man after God's heart, but not after mens heart: many were those that hated him, and fought his ruin; Saul is particularly named, either, 1. As distinguished from his enemies of the heathen nations; Saul hated David, but David did not hate Saul, and therefore would not reckon him among his enemies; or, rather, 2. As the chief of his enemies, that was more malicious and powerful than any of them. Let not those whom God loves, marvel if the world hate them.

2. They that trust God in the way of duty, shall find him a present help to them in their greatest dangers. David did so, God delivered him out of the hand of Saul, he takes special notice of that; remarkable preservations should be mentioned in our praises with a particular remark. He delivered him also out of the hand of all his enemies, one after another; sometimes in one way, sometimes in another: and David, from his own experience, has assured us, that though many are the troubles of the righteous, yet the Lord delivers them out of them all, Psalm xxxiv. 19. We shall never be delivered from all our enemies till we get to heaven; and to that heavenly kingdom God will preserve all his, 2 Tim. iv. 18.

3. Those that have received signal mercies, and many from God, ought to give him the glory of them. Every new mercy in our hand, should put a new song into our mouth, even praises to our God. Where there is a grateful heart, out of the abundance of that the mouth will speak; David spake not to himself only for his own pleasure, or to those about him, only for their instruction; but to the Lord, for his honour, the words of this song. Then we sing with grace when we sing to the Lord. In distress he cried with his voice, Psalm cxlii. 1. therefore with his voice he gave thanks: that is the sweetest vocal musick.

4. We ought to be speedy in our thankful returns to God: In the day that God delivered him, he sang this song. While the mercy is fresh, and we are most affected with it, let the thank-offering be brought, to be kindled with the fire of that affection.

2. And he said, The LORD is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer, 3. The God of my rock, in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence. 4. I will call on the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies. 5. When the waves of death compassed me: the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. 6. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. 7. In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God, and he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry did enter into his ears. 8. Then the earth shook and trembled: the foundations of heaven moved and shook because he was wroth. 9. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. 10. He bowed the heavens also and came down: and darkness was under his feet. 11. And he rode up

on a cherub, and did fly: and he was seen upon the wings of the wind. 12. And he made darkness pavilions round about him, dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies. 13. Through the brightness before him were coals of fire kindled. 14. The LORD thundred from heaven, and the most High uttered his voice. 15. And he sent out arrows, and scattered them; lightning, and discomfited them. 16. And the chanel of the sea appeared, the foundations of the world were discovered, at the rebuking of the LORD, at the blast of the breath of his nostrils. 17. He sent from above, he took me: he drew me out of many waters. 18. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me. 19. They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay. 20. He brought me forth also into a large place, he delivered me, because he delighted in me. 21. The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness: according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. 22. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. 23. For all his judgments were before me: and as for his statutes, I did not depart from them. 24. I was also upright before him, and have kept my self from mine iniquity. 25. Therefore the LORD hath recompensed me according to my righteousness: according to my cleanness in his eye-sight. 26. With the merciful thou wilt shew thy self merciful, and with the upright man thou wilt shew thy self upright. 27. With the pure thou wilt shew thy self pure, and with the froward thou wilt shew thy self unfavoury. 28. And the afflicted people thou wilt save: but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down. 29. For thou art my lamp, O LORD: and the LORD will lighten my darkness. 30. For by thee I have run through a troop: by my God have I leaped over a wall. 31. As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him. 32. For who is God, save the LORD? and who is a rock, save our God? 33. God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect. 34. He maketh my feet like hinds feet: and setteth me upon my high places. 35. He teacheth my hands to war: so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. 36. Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy gentleness hath made me great. 37. Thou hast enlarged my steps under me: so that my feet did not slip. 38. I have pursued mine enemies, and destroyed them: and turned not again until I had consumed them. 39. And I have consumed them, and wounded them, that they could not arise: yea, they are fallen under my feet. 40. For thou hast girded me with strength to battle: them that rose up against me, hast thou subdued under me. 41. Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies, that I might destroy them that hate me. 42. They looked, but there was none to save: even unto the LORD, but he answered them not. 43. Then did I beat them as small as the dust of the earth, I did stamp them as the mire of the street, and did spread them abroad. 44. Thou also hast delivered me from the strivings of my people, thou hast kept me to be head of the heathen: a people which I knew not, shall serve me. 45. Strangers shall submit themselves unto me, as soon as they hear, they shall be obedient to me. 46. Strangers shall fade away, and they shall be afraid out of their close places. 47. The LORD liveth, and blessed be my rock: and exalted be the God of the rock of my salvation. 48. It is God that avengeth me, and that bringeth down the people under me, 49. And that bringeth me forth from mine enemies: thou also hast lifted me up on high above them that rose up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man. 50. Therefore I will give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and I will sing praises unto thy name. 51. He is the tower of salvation for his king: and sheweth mercy to his anointed, unto David, and to his seed for evermore.

Let us observe in this song of praise.

1. How David adores God, and gives him the glory of his infinite perfections. There is none like him, nor any to be compared with

with him, *ver. 32. Who is God, save the Lord?* All others that are adored as deities, are counterfeits and pretenders: None to be relied on but he, *Who is a rock, save our God?* They are dead, but *the Lord liveth, ver. 47.* They fail their worshippers when they most need them: But *as for God, his way is perfect, ver. 31.* Men begin in kindness, but end not, promise but perform not, but God will finish his work, and his word is tried, and what we may trust.

2. How he triumphs in the interest he had in this God, and his relation to him, which he lays down as the foundation of all the benefits he had received from him. He is my God, as such he cries to him, *ver. 7.* and cleaves to him, *ver. 22.* and if my God, then my rock, *ver. 2. i. e. my strength and my power, ver. 33.* the rock under which I take shelter, and who is to me as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land: The rock on which I build my hope. *The God of my rock, ver. 3.* whatever is my strength and support, it is he that makes it so; nay, he is *the God of the rock of my salvation, ver. 47.* my saving strength is in him, and from him. David oft hid himself in rocks, *1 Sam. xxiv. 2.* but God was his chief hiding place. He is my fortress, in whom I am safe, and think my self so, *my high tower, or strong hold, in which I am out of the reach of real evils, the tower of salvation, ver. 51.* which can neither be scaled, nor battered, nor undermined, salvation it self saves me: Am I in distress? He is my deliverer: Struck at, shot at? He is my shield: Pursued? He is my refuge: Oppressed: He is my favour, that rescues me out of the hand of those that seek my ruin: Nay, he is the *horn of my salvation*, by which I am strongly protected, and my enemies strongly pushed: Christ is spoken of as the *horn of salvation*, in the house of David: *Luke i. 69.* Am I burthened and ready to sink? *The Lord is my stay, ver. 14.* by whom I am supported: Am I in the dark, benighted, at a loss, *thou art my lamp, O Lord, to shew me my way, and wilt lighten my darkness, ver. 29.* If in sincerity we take the Lord for our God, all this, and much more he will be to us, all we need, and can desire.

3. What improvement he makes of his interest in God. If he be mine, *1. In him will I trust, ver. 3. i. e. I will devote my self to his conduct, and then depend upon his power, and wisdom, and goodness to conduct me well. 2. On him will I call, ver. 4. for he is worthy to be praised.* What we have found in God, that is worthy to be praised, should engage us to pray to him, and thereby we do in effect praise him, and give glory to him. *3. To him will I give thanks, ver. 50.* and that publickly; when he was among the heathen, he would neither be afraid, nor ashamed to own his obligations to the God of Israel.

4. The full and large account he keeps for himself, and gives to others of the great and kind things God had done for him. This takes up most of the song. He gives God the glory both of his deliverances, and of his successes: shewing, both the perils he was delivered from, and the power he was advanced to.

(1.) He magnifies the great salvations God has wrought for him. God sometimes brings his people into very great difficulties and dangers, that he may have the honour of saving them, and they the comfort of being saved by him. He owns, *Thou hast saved me from violence, ver. 3. from mine enemies, ver. 4. from my strong enemy,* meaning Saul, who, if God had not succoured him would have been too hard for him, *ver. 18.* thou hast given me *the shield of thy salvation, ver. 36.* To magnify the salvation he observes,

1. That the danger was very great and threatening, out of which he was delivered. Men *rose up against him, ver. 40, 49.* that *hated him, ver. 41.* a *violent man, ver. 49.* viz. Saul, who was malicious in his designs against him, and vigorous in his pursuits. This is expressed figuratively, *ver. 5, 6.* He was surrounded with death on every side, threatened to be over-whelmed, and saw no way of escape: So violently did the waves of death beat upon them, so strongly did the cords and snares of death hold him; he could not help himself, no more than a man in the grave can. The floods of Belial, the wicked one, and his wicked instruments made him afraid; he trembled to see not only earth, but death and hell in arms against him.

2. That his deliverance was an answer to prayer, *ver. 7.* He has here left us a good example, when we are in distress to cry unto God with importunity, as children in a fright cry to their parents; and great encouragement to do so, in that he found God ready to answer prayer out of his temple in heaven, where he is continually served and adored.

3. That God appeared in a singular and extraordinary manner for him, and against his enemies: The expressions are borrowed from the descent of the Divine Majesty upon mount Sinai, *ver. 8, 9, &c.* We do not find, that in any of David's battles God fought for him, either with thunder, as in Samuel's time, or with hail, as in Joshua's time, or with the stars in their courses, as in Deborah's time: but those lofty metaphors are used, *1.* To set forth the glory of God, which was manifested in his deliverance; his wisdom and power, his goodness and faithfulness, his justice and holiness, and his sovereign dominion over all the creatures, and all the counsels of men, which appeared in favour of David, were as clear and bright a discovery of God's glory to an eye of faith, as those would have been to an eye of sense. *2.* To set forth God's displeasure against his enemies: God so espoused his cause, that he shewed himself an enemy to all his enemies; his anger is set forth by a *smoke-out of*

his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth, ver. 9. coals kindled, *ver. 13.* arrows, *ver. 15.* Who knows the power and terror of his wrath? *3.* To set forth the mighty confusion which his enemies were put into, and the consternation that seized them; as if the earth had trembled, and the foundations of the world had been discovered, *ver. 8, 16.* Who can stand before God when he is angry? *4.* To shew how ready God was to help him; he *rode upon a cherub and did fly, ver. 11.* God hastened to his succour, and came in to him with seasonable relief, though he had seemed at a distance. Yet he was *a God hiding himself, (Isa. xlv. 15.)* for he *made darkness his pavilion, ver. 12.* for the amazement of his enemies, and the amusement of his own people.

4. That God manifested his particular favour and kindness to him in these deliverances, *ver. 20.* *He delivered me, because he delighted in me.* The deliverance came not from common providence, but covenant love; he was herein treated as a favourite, so he perceived by the communications of divine grace, and comfort to his soul, with these deliverances, and the communion he had with God in them. Herein he was a type of Christ, whom God upheld because he *delighted in him, Isa. xlii. 1, 2.*

(2.) He magnifies the great successes God had crowned him with; he had not only preserved but prospered him. He was blest, *1.* With liberty and enlargement. He was *brought into a large place, ver. 20.* where he had room to thrive; and his *steps were enlarged under him, so that he had room to stir, ver. 37.* no longer straitened and confined. *2.* With military skill and strength, and swiftness; though he was bred up to the crook, he was wonderfully instructed in the arts of war, and spirited for the toils and perils of it. God having called him to fight his battles, he qualified him for the service, made him very ingenious: *he teacheth my hands to war, ver. 35.* and this ingenuity was as good as strength, for it follows, *so that a bow of steel is broken by my arms, not so much by main force, as by flight of hand, hands so well taught.* And very vigorous and valiant: *Thou hast girded me with strength to battle, ver. 40.* he gives God the glory of all his courage, and ability for service. And very expeditious; *He maketh my feet swift like hinds feet, ver. 34.* which is of great advantage, both in charging and retreating. *3.* With victory over his enemies, not only Saul and Abalom, but the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Syrians, and other neighbour nations, whom he subdued, and made tributaries to Israel. His wonderful victories are here described, *ver. 38,—43.* They were speedy victories, *I turned not again, till I had consumed them, ver. 38.* and compleat victories; the enemies of Israel were *wounded, destroyed, consumed, fell under his feet, trampled upon, and disabled to rise, and their necks lay at his mercy.* They cried both to earth and heaven for help, but in vain, *there was none to save, none that durst appear for them; God answered them not, for they were not of his side, nor did they cry unto him, till they were brought to the last extremity; being thus abandoned, they became an easy prey to David's righteous and victorious sword, so that he beat them as small as the dust of the earth, which is scattered by the wind, and trodden on by every foot. 4.* With advancement to honour and power. To this he was anointed before his troubles began, and at length, *post tot discrimina rerum,* he gained his point. God *made his way perfect, ver. 33.* gave him success in all his undertakings. *Set him upon his high places, ver. 34.* noting both safety and dignity. God's gentleness, his grace and tender mercy, *made him great, ver. 36.* gave him great wealth, and great authority, and a name like that of the great men of the earth. He was *kept to be the head of the heathen, ver. 44.* his signal preservations evidenced, that he was designed and reserved for something great: To rule over all Israel, notwithstanding the *strivings of the people, and so that they, whom he had not known, should serve him, many of the nations that lay remote. Thus he was lifted up on high as high as the throne, above those that rose up against him, ver. 49.*

5. The comfortable reflections he makes upon his own integrity, which God, by those wonderful deliverances had graciously owned, and witnessed to, *ver. 21,—25.* He means, especially his integrity with reference to Saul and Ish-bosheth, Abalom and Sheba, and those who either opposed his coming to the crown, or endeavoured to dethrone him; they falsely accused him and misrepresented him, but he had the testimony of his conscience for him, that he was not an ambitious aspiring man, a false and bloody man, as they called him; that he had never taken any indirect unlawful courses to secure or raise himself, but in his whole conduct, had kept in the way of his duty: And that in the whole course of his conversation he had, for the main, made religion his business, so that he could take God's favours to him, as the rewards of his righteousness, not of debt, but of grace; God had recompensed him, though not for his righteousness, as if that had merited any thing at the hand of God, yet according to his righteousness, which he was well pleased with and had an eye to.

His conscience witnessed for him, *1.* That he had made the word of God his rule, and had kept to it, *ver. 23.* wherever he was God's judgments were before him, as his guide; where-ever he went he took his religion along with him, and though he was forced to depart from his country, and sent, as it were, to serve other gods, yet as for God's statutes, he did not depart from them; but kept the way of the Lord, and walked in it. *2.* That he had carefully avoided the by-paths of sin. He had not wickedly depart-

ed from his God; he could not say, but that he had taken some false steps, but he had not deserted God, nor forsaken his way. Sins of infirmity he could not acquit himself from, but the grace of God had kept him from presumptuous sins. Though he had sometimes weakly departed from his duty, he had never wickedly departed from his God. By this it appeared, he was *upright before God*, or to God, in his sight, and with an eye to him, that he *kept himself from his own iniquity*: not only from that particular sin of killing Saul, when it was in the power of his hand to do it, but in general he was afraid of sin, and watchful against it, and made conscience of what he said and did. The matter of Uriah is an exception, 1 Kings xv. 5. like that in Hezekiah's character, 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. Note, A careful abstaining from our own iniquity, is one of the best evidences of our own integrity; and the testimony of our consciences for us that we have done so, will be such a rejoicing, as will not only lessen the griefs of an afflicted state, but increase the comforts of an advanced state. David reflected with more comfort upon his victories over his own iniquity, than upon his conquest of Goliath, and all the hosts of the uncircumcised Philistines; and the witness of his own heart to his uprightness was sweeter, though more silent music, than theirs that sang, *David has slain his ten thousands*. If a great man be a good man, his goodness will be much more his satisfaction, than his greatness. Let favour be shewed to the upright, and his uprightness will sweeten it, will double it.

6. The comfortable prospects he has of God's further favour; as he looks back, so he looks forward with pleasure, and assures himself of the kindness God had in store, for all the saints, for himself, and for his seed.

1. For all good people; *ver. 26, 27, 28*. As God had dealt with him according to his uprightness, so he will with all others. He takes occasion here to lay down the established rules of God's proceedings with the children of men. 1. That he will do good to those that are good and upright in their hearts. As we are found towards God, he will be found towards us. (1.) God's mercy and grace will be the joy of those that are merciful and gracious: even the merciful need mercy, and they shall obtain it. (2.) God's uprightness; his justice and faithfulness will be the joy of those that are upright, just and faithful both towards God and man. (3.) God's purity and holiness will be the joy of those that are pure and holy, who therefore give thanks at the remembrance of it. And if any of these good people be *afflicted people*, he will save them, either out of their afflictions, or by and after them. On the other hand, 2. That those who turn aside to crooked ways, he will lead forth with the workers of iniquity, as he saith in another psalm. *With the forward he will wrestle*; and those with whom God wrestles, are sure to go by the worse. *Wo unto him that strives with his Maker!* he will walk contrary to those that walk contrary to him, and be displeased with those that are displeased with him. As for the haughty his eyes are upon them, marking them out as it were to be brought down, for *he resists the proud*.

2. For himself. He foresees that his conquests and kingdom should be yet further enlarged, *ver. 45, 46*. Even the *sons of the stranger*, that should hear the report of his victories, and the tokens of God's presence with him, should be possessed with a fear of him, should be forced to submit to him, though feignedly, and should be obedient to him. The successes which he had had he looked upon as earnest of more, and means of more: who durst oppose him, whom so many had been overcome by? Thus the son of David goes on *conquering, and to conquer*, Rev. vi. 7. His gospel that has been victorious shall be so more and more.

3. For his seed; he *sheweth mercy to his Messiah*, *ver. 51*. not only to David himself, but to that seed of his for evermore. David was himself anointed of God, not a usurper, but duly called to the government, and qualified for it, therefore he doubted not but God would shew mercy to him: that mercy he had promised not to take from him, nor from his posterity, *chap. vii. 15, 16*. on that promise he depends with an eye to Christ, who alone is his *seed for evermore*, whose throne and kingdom still continue, and will to the end, when the seed and lineage of David is long since extinct. See *Psalms lxxxix. 28, 29*. Thus all his joys and all his hopes terminate, as ours always should, in the great Redeemer.

C H A P. XXIII.

The historian is now drawing towards a conclusion of David's reign, and therefore gives us an account here, 1. Of some of his last words, which he spoke by inspiration, and which seem to have reference to his seed that was to be for evermore, spoken of in the close of the foregoing chapter, *ver. 1,—7*. 2. Of the great men, especially the military men, that were employed under him, the first three, *ver. 8,—17*. Two of the next three, *ver. 18,—23*. And then the thirty, *ver. 24,—39*.

1. NOW these be the last words of David: David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, 2. The spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. 3. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to

me, He that ruleth over men *must be just*; ruling in the fear of God: 4. And *he shall be* as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, *even* a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. 5. Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for *this is* all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow. 6. ¶ But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands. 7. But the man that shall touch them, must be fenced with iron, and the staff of a spear, and they shall be utterly burnt with fire in the same place.

We have here the last will and testament of king David, or a codicil annexed to it, after he had settled the crown upon Solomon, and his treasures upon the temple which was to be built. The last words of great and good men, are thought worthy to be in a special manner remarked and remembred, David would have those taken notice of and added, either to his Psalms (as they are here to that in the foregoing chapter) or to the chronicles of his reign. These words especially, *ver. 5*. though recorded before, we may suppose, he oft repeated for his own consolation, even to his last breath, and therefore they are called his *last words*. When we find death approaching, we should endeavour both to honour God, and to edify those about us with our last words. Let those that have had long experience of God's goodness, and the pleasantness of the ways of wisdom, when they come to finish their course, leave a record of those experiences, and bear their testimony to the truth of the promise. We have upon record the last words of Jacob, and Moses, and here of David, designed, as those, for a legacy to them that were left behind. We are here told,

1. Whose last will and testament this is; this is related, either, as is usual, by the testator himself, or rather by the historian, *ver. 1*. He is described, 1. By the meanness of his original: he was *the son of Jesse*. It is good for those who are advanced to be corner-stones, and top-stones, to be oft minded, and oft to remember *the rock out of which they were hewn*. 2. The height of his elevation: he was *raised up on high*, as one favoured of God, and designed for something great; raised up as a prince, to sit higher than his neighbours, and as a prophet, to see further: for, 1. He was *the anointed of the God of Jacob*, and so was serviceable to the people of God in their civil interests, the protection of their country, and the administration of justice among them. (2.) He was *the sweet psalmist of Israel*, and so was serviceable to them in their religious exercises: he penned the psalms, set the tunes, appointed both the fingers and the instruments of music, by which the devotions of good people were much excited and enlarged. Note, Singing of psalms is a sweet ordinance, very agreeable to those that delight in praising God. It is reckoned among the honours to which David was raised up, that he was a psalmist: in that he was as truly great, as in his being *the anointed of the God of Jacob*. Note, It is true preferment to be serviceable to the church in acts of devotion, and instrumental to promote the blessed work of prayer and praise. Observe, was David a prince? he was so for Jacob: was he a psalmist? he was so for Israel. Note, The dispensation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal, and therefore *as every man has received the gift, so let him minister the same*.

2. What the purport of it is. It is an account of his communion with God. Observe,

1. What God said to him, both for his direction and for his encouragement, as a king, and to be in like manner of use to his successors. Gracious souls take a pleasure in calling to mind what they have heard from God, in recollecting his word, and revolving it in their minds. Thus what God spoke once, David heard twice, yea often.

See here, 1. Who spoke. *The Spirit of the Lord; the God of Israel, and the Rock of Israel*; which some think is an intimation of the trinity of persons in the Godhead; the Father *the God of Israel*, the Son *the rock of Israel*, and the Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, *who spake by the prophets*, and particularly by David, and whose word was not only in his heart, but in his tongue, for the benefit of others. David here avows his divine inspiration, that in his psalms, and in this composition here, *the Spirit of God spake by him*. He, and other holy men, spake and wrote *as they were moved by the holy Ghost*. This puts an honour upon the book of Psalms, and recommends them to our use in our devotions, that they are words which the holy Ghost teacheth.

2. What was spoken. Here seems to be a distinction made between what the Spirit of God spoke by David, which includes all his psalms, and what the Rock of Israel spoke to David, which concerned himself, and his family. Let ministers observe, that those by whom God speaks to others, are concerned to hear and heed what he speaks to themselves. They whose office it is to teach others their duty, must be sure to learn and do their own.

Now that which is here said, *ver. 3, 4*. may be considered, (1.) With application to David and his royal family. And so here is, 1. The duty of magistrates enjoined them. When a king was spoken to from God, he was not to be complimented with the

height of his dignity, and the extent of his power, but to be told his duty. *Must is for the king*, we say, here is a must for the king, *he must be just, ruling in the fear of God*; and so must all inferior magistrates in their places. Let rulers remember that they *rule over men*, not over beasts, whom they may enslave and abuse at pleasure, but over reasonable creatures, and of the same rank with themselves. They *rule over men* that have their follies and infirmities, and therefore must be born with. They *rule over men*, but under God, and for him; and therefore, (1.) They *must be just*, both to those over whom they rule, in allowing them their rights and properties, and between those over whom they rule, using their power to right the injured against the injurious; see *Deut. i. 16, 17*. It is not enough that they do no wrong, but they must not suffer wrong to be done. (2.) They must *rule in the fear of God*, i. e. they must themselves be possessed with a fear of God, by which they will be effectually restrained from all acts of injustice and oppression: Nehemiah was so, *chap. v. 15*. *So did not I, because of the fear of God*; and Joseph, *Gen. xlii. 18*. They must also endeavour to promote the fear of God, i. e. the practice of religion among those over whom they rule. The magistrate is to be the keeper of both tables, and to protect both godliness and honesty. 2. Prosperity promised them if they do this duty. *He that rules in the fear of God, shall be as the light of the morning*, ver. 4. Light is sweet and pleasant, and he that doth his duty shall have the comfort of it; his rejoicing will be the testimony of his conscience. Light is bright, and a good prince is illustrious; his justice and piety will be his honour. Light is a blessing, nor are there any greater and more extensive blessings to the publick than princes that *rule in the fear of God*. It is like *the light of the morning*, which is most welcome after the darkness of the night, so was David's government after Saul's, *Psalms lxxv. 3*, and which is increasing, *shines more and more to the perfect day*; such is the growing lustre of a good government. It is likewise compared to the tender grass, which the earth produceth for the service of man; it brings with it a harvest of blessings. See *Psalms lxxii. 6, 16*, which were also some of the last words of David, and seem to refer to these here.

(2.) With application to Christ, the son of David; and then it must all be taken as a prophecy, and the original will bear it; *There shall be a ruler among men*, or over men, that *shall be just*, and *shall rule in the fear of God*, i. e. shall order the affairs of religion, and divine worship, according to his Father's will; and he shall be as *the light of the morning*, &c. for he is the light of the world, and as *the tender grass*, for he is the *branch of the Lord*, and the *fruit of the earth*, *Isa. iv. 2*. Compare this with those promises of Christ, which speak of his *reigning in righteousness*, and being of *quick understanding in the fear of the Lord*, *Isa. xi. 1, 5*. *xxxii. 1, 2*. *Psalms lxxii. 2*. This God, by the Spirit, gave David the foresight of, to comfort him under the many calamities of his family, and the melancholy prospects he had of the degeneracy of his seed.

2. What comfortable use he made of this which God spake to him, and what were his devout meditations on it, by way of reply, ver. 5. It is not unlike his meditation on occasion of such a message, *2 Sam. vii. 18, &c.* What goes before *the Rock of Israel* spake to him, this the Spirit of God spake by him, and it is a most excellent confession of his faith and hope in the everlasting covenant. Here is,

(1.) Trouble supposed. *Although my house be not so with God, and although he make it not to grow*. David's family was not so with God, as is described, ver. 3, 4. and as he could wish; not so good, not so happy; it had not been so while he lived, he foresaw it would not be so when he was gone; that his house would be neither so pious nor so prosperous as one might have expected the offspring of such a father to be. 1. *Not so with God*. Note, We and ours are that really which we are with God. This was it that David's heart was upon concerning his children, that they might be right with God, faithful to him, and zealous for him. But the children of godly parents are oftentimes neither so holy, nor so happy, as might be expected. We must be made to know, that it is corruption, not grace, that runs in the blood; that the race is not to the swift, but God gives his Spirit as a free agent. 2. *Not made to grow*, in number, in power; it is God that makes families to grow, or not to grow, *Psalms cvii. 41*. Good men have oft the melancholy prospect of a declining family. David's house was typical of the church of Christ, which is his house, *Heb. iii. 3*. Suppose this be not so with God as we could wish, suppose it be diminished, distressed, disgraced, and weakened, by errors and corruptions, almost extinct, yet God has made a covenant with the church's head, the son of David, that he will preserve to him a seed, that the gates of hell shall never prevail against his house. This our Saviour comforted himself with in his sufferings, that the covenant with him stood firm, *Isa. liii. 10, 11, 12*.

(2.) Comfort infused; *Yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant*. Whatever trouble a child of God may have the prospect of, still he hath some comfort or other to balance it with, *2 Cor. iv. 8, 9*, and none like this here. 1. It may be understood of the covenant of royalty, in the type which God made with David and his seed touching the kingdom, *Psalms cxxxii. 11, 12*. But, 2. It must look further to the covenant of grace made with all believers, that God will be in Christ to them a God, which was signified by the covenant of royalty, and therefore the promises of the covenant are called *the sure mercies of David*, *Isa. lv. 3*. It is this only that

is the everlasting covenant, and it cannot be imagined, that David, who in so many of his psalms speaks so clearly concerning Christ, and the grace of the gospel, should forget it in his last words. God has made a covenant of grace with us in Jesus Christ, and we are here told, (1.) That it is an everlasting covenant, from everlasting, in the contrivance and counsel of it, and to everlasting, in the continuance and consequences of it. 2. That it is ordered, well ordered in all things, admirably well, to advance the glory of God, and the honour of the Mediator, together with the holiness and comfort of believers. It is herein well ordered, that whatever is required in the covenant is promised, and that every transgression in the covenant, doth not throw us out of covenant; and that it puts our salvation, not in our own keeping, but in the keeping of a mediator. (3.) That it is sure, and therefore sure, because well ordered; the general offer of it is sure, the promised mercies sure, upon the performance of the conditions. The particular application of it to true believers is sure, it is sure to all the seed. (4.) That it is all our salvation; nothing but this will save us, and this is sufficient: it is this only upon which our salvation depends. (5.) That therefore it must be all our desire. Let me have an interest in this covenant, and the promises of it, and I have enough, I desire no more.

3. Here is the doom of the sons of Belial read, ver. 6, 7. (1.) They shall be thrust away as thorns, rejected, abandoned; they are like thorns, not to be touched with hands, so passionate and furious, that they cannot be managed, or dealt with by a wife and faithful reproof, but must be restrained by law, and the sword of justice, *Psalms xxxii. 9*, and therefore like thorns. (2.) They shall at length be *utterly burnt with fire in the same place*, *Heb. vi. 8*. Now this is intended either, 1. As a direction to magistrates to use their power for the punishing and suppressing of wickedness. Let them *thrust away the sons of Belial*; see *Psalms ci. 8*. Or, 2. As a caution to magistrates, and particularly to David's sons and successors, to see that they be not themselves sons of Belial (as too many of them were) for then neither the dignity of their place, nor their relation to David, would secure them from being thrust away by the righteous judgments of God. Though men could not deal with them, God would. Or, 3. As a prediction of the ruin of all the implacable enemies of Christ's kingdom; there are enemies without, that openly oppose it, and fight against it; and enemies within, that secretly betray it, and are false to it; both are sons of Belial, children of the wicked one, of the serpent's seed; both are as thorns, grievous and vexatious: but both shall be so thrust away, as that Christ will set up his kingdom in despite of their enmity, will go *through them*, *Isa. xxvii. 4*, and will in due time bless his church with such peace, that there shall be *no pricking briar, nor grieving thorn*. And those that will not repent, to give glory to God, shall, in the judgment day (to which the Chaldee paraphrast refers this) be burnt with unquenchable fire. See *Luke xix. 27*.

8. ¶ These be the names of the mighty men whom David had; The Tachmonite that sat in the seat, chief among the captains (the same was Adino the Eznite) *he lift up his spear* against eight hundred, whom he slew at one time. 9. And after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite, *one* of the three mighty men with David, when they defied the Philistines *that* were there gathered together to battle, and the men of Israel were gone away. 10. He arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword: and the LORD wrought a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to spoil. 11. And after him was Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite: and the Philistines were gathered together into a troop, where was a piece of ground full of lentiles: and the people fled from the Philistines. 12. But he stood in the midst of the ground and defended it, and slew the Philistines: and the LORD wrought a great victory. 13. And three of the thirty chief went down and came to David in the harvest-time, unto the cave of Adullam: and the troop of the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim. 14. And David was then in an hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Beth-lehem. 15. And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Beth-lehem, which is by the gate. 16. And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Beth-lehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the LORD. 17. And he said, Be it far from me, O LORD, that I should do this: *is not this* the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it. These things did these three mighty men. 18. And Abishai the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief among three; and he lift up

up his spear against three hundred, *and slew them*, and had the name among three. 19. Was he not most honourable of three? Therefore he was their captain: howbeit, he attained not unto the *first* three. 20. And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had done many acts, he slew two lion-like men of Moab: he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow. 21. And he slew an Egyptian, a goodly man: and the Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptians hand, and slew him with his own spear. 22. These *things* did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and had the name among three mighty men. 23. He was more honourable than the thirty, but he attained not to the *first* three: and David set him over his guard. 24. Asahel the brother of Joab *was* one of the thirty; Elhanan the son of Dodo of Beth-lehem, 25. Shammah the Harodite, Elikah the Harodite, 26. Helez the Paltite, Ira the son of Ikkeiah the Tekoite, 27. Abiezer the Anethothite, Mebunnai the Hushathite, 28. Zalmon the Ahohite, Maharai the Netophathite, 29. Heleb the son of Baanah, a Netophathite, Ittai the son of Ribai out of Gibeah of the children of Benjamin, 30. Benaiah the Pirathonite, Hiddai of the brooks of Gaash, 31. Abi-albon the Arbathite, Azmaveth the Barhumite, 32. Eliahba the Shalbonite; of the sons of Jashen, Jonathan, 33. Shammah the Hararite, Ahiam the son of Sharar the Hararite, 34. Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite, Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite, 35. Hezrai the Carmelite, Paarai the Arbite, 36. Igal the son of Nathan of Zobah, Bani the Gadite, 37. Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the Beerothite, armour-bearer to Joab the son of Zeruiah, 38. Ira an Ithrite, Gareb an Ithrite, 39. Uriah the Hittite: thirty and seven in all.

The catalogue which the historian has here left upon record of the great soldiers, that were in David's time, is intended, 1. For the honour of David, who trained them up in the arts and exercises of war, and set them an example of conduct and courage. It is the reputation as well as the advantage of a prince, to be attended and served by such brave men as are here described. 2. For the honour of those worthies themselves, who were instrumental to bring David to the crown, settle and protect him in the throne, and to enlarge his conquests. Note, Those that in publick stations venture themselves, and lay out themselves, to serve the interests of their country, are worthy of double honour, both to be respected by those of their own age, and to be remembered by posterity. 3. To excite those that come after to a generous emulation. 4. To shew how much religion contributes to the inspiring of men with true courage. David, both by his psalms, and by his offerings for the service of the temple, greatly promoted piety among the grandees of the kingdom, 1 *Chron.* xxix. 6. and when they became famous for piety, they became famous for bravery.

Now these mighty men are here divided into three ranks.

1. The first three, who had done the greatest exploits, and thereby gained the greatest reputation. Adino, *ver.* 8. Eleazar, *ver.* 9, 10. and Shammah, *ver.* 11, 12. I do not remember, that we read of any of these, or of their actions any where else in all the story of David, but here, and in the parallel place, 1 *Chron.* xi. Many great and remarkable events are passed by in the annals, which relate rather the blemishes, than the glories of David's reign, especially after his sin in the matter of Uriah; so that we may think it was really more illustrious than it has seemed in our reading the story of it.

The exploits of this brave triumvirate are here recorded. They signalized themselves in the wars of Israel, against their enemies, especially the Philistines. 1. Adino slew eight hundred at once, with his spear. 2. Eleazar defied the Philistines, as they by Goliath had defied Israel, but with better success, and greater bravery, for when the men of Israel were gone away, he not only kept his ground, but *arose and smote the Philistines*, on whom God struck a terror equal to the courage with which this great hero was inspired. His hand was weary, and yet it clave to his sword, as long as he had any strength remaining he held his weapon, and followed his blow. Thus in the service of God, we should keep up the willingness and resolution of the spirit, notwithstanding the weakness and weariness of the flesh: faint, yet pursuing (*Judg.* viii. 4.) the hand weary, yet not quitting the sword. Now Eleazar had beaten the enemy the men of Israel that were gone away from the battle, *ver.* 9. returned to spoil, *ver.* 10. It is common for those who quit the field, when any thing is to be done, to hasten to it when any thing is to be got. 3. Shammah met with a party of the enemy, that were foraging, and routed them, *ver.* 11, 12. But observe

both concerning his exploit, and the former, it is here said, *The Lord wrought a great victory*. Note, How great soever the bravery of the instruments is, the praise of the achievement must be given to God. These fought the battles, but God wrought the victory: Let not the strong man then glory in his strength, or any of his military operations, but *let him that glories, glory in the Lord*.

2. The next three were distinguished from, and dignified above the thirty, but attained not to the first three, *ver.* 23. All great men are not of the same size. Many a bright and benign star there is, which is not of the first magnitude; and many a good ship not of the first rate: of this second triumvirate, two only are named, Abishai and Benaiah, whom we have often met with in the story of David; and who seem to have been not inferior in serviceableness, though they were in dignity, to the first three.

Here is, 1. A brave action of those three in conjunction. They attended David in his troubles, when he absconded in the cave of Adullam, *ver.* 13. suffered with him, and therefore were afterwards preferred with him. When David and his brave men that attended him, who had acted so vigorously against the Philistines, were, by the iniquity of the times in Saul's reign, driven to shelter themselves from his rage in caves and strong-holds, no marvel that the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim, and put a garison even in Bethlehem it self, *ver.* 13, 14. If the church's guides are so misled, as to persecute some of her best friends and champions, the common enemy will no doubt get advantage by it. If David had had his liberty, Bethlehem should not have been now in the Philistines hands.

But being so, we are here told, 1. How earnestly David longed for the water of the well of Bethlehem. Some make it a publick-spirited wish, and that he meant, O that we could drive the garison of the Philistines out of Bethlehem, and make that beloved city of mine our own again; the well being put for the city, as the river oft signifies the country it passes through. But if he meant so, those about him did not understand him; therefore it seems rather to be an instance of his weakness: It was harvest-time, the weather was hot, he was thirsty, perhaps, good water was scarce, and therefore he earnestly wishes, O that I could but have one draught of the water of the well of Bethlehem! With the water of that well he had oft refreshed himself when he was a youth, and nothing now will serve him but that, though it is almost impossible to come at it. He longed like a woman with child, strangely indulging a humour which he could give no reason for. Other water might quench his thirst as well, but he had a fancy for that above any. It is folly to entertain such fancies, and greater folly to insist upon the gratification of them. We ought to check our appetites, when they go out inordinately towards those things that really are more pleasant and grateful than other things, *Be not desirous of dainties*, much more when they are thus set upon things as only please a humour. 2. How bravely his three mighty men, Abishai, Benaiah, and another not named, ventured through the camp of the Philistines, upon the very mouth of danger, and fetched water from the well of Bethlehem, without David's knowledge. When he wished for it, he was far from desiring that any of his men should venture their lives for it, but those three did, *ver.* 18. To shew, 1. How much they valued their prince, and with what pleasure they could run the greatest hazards, and undergo the greatest hardships in his service. David, though anointed king, was as yet an exile, a poor prince that had no external advantages to recommend him to the affection and esteem of his attendance, nor was he in any capacity to prefer or reward them, yet those three were thus zealous for his satisfaction, firmly believing the time of recompence would come. Let us be willing to venture in the cause of Christ, even when it is a suffering cause, as those that are assured it will prevail, and we shall not lose by it at last. Were they so forward to expose themselves upon the least hint of their prince's mind, and so ambitious to please him? And shall not we covet to approve our selves to our Lord Jesus, by a ready compliance with every intimation of his will, given us by his word, Spirit, and providence? 2. How little they feared the Philistines. They were glad of an occasion to defy them. Whether they broke through the host clandestinely, and with such art that the Philistines did not discover them, or openly, and with such terror in their looks, that the Philistines durst not oppose them, is not certain; it should seem they forced their way, sword in hand. But see, 3. How self-denyingly David, when he had this far-fetched, dear-bought water, *poured it out before the Lord*, *ver.* 17. (1.) Thus he would shew the tender regard he had to the lives of his soldiers, and how far he was from being prodigal of their blood, *Psal.* lxxii. 14. In God's sight the death of his saints is precious. (2.) Thus he would testify his sorrow, for speaking that foolish word, which occasioned those men to put their lives in their hands. Great men should take heed what they say, lest any ill use be made of it by those about them. (3.) Thus he would prevent the like rashness in any of his men for the future. (4.) Thus he would cross his own foolish fancy, and punish himself for entertaining and indulging it, and shew that he had sober thoughts to correct his rash ones, and knew how to deny himself, even in that which he was most fond of. Such generous mortifications become the wise, the great, and the good. (5.) Thus he would honour God, and give glory to him; the water purchased at this rate, he thought too precious for his own drinking, and fit only to be poured out to

God as a drink-offering. If it were the blood of these men it was God's due, for the blood was always his. (6.) Bishop Patrick speaks of some who think that David hereby shewed it was not material water he longed for, but the Messiah, who had the water of life; who he knew should be born at Bethlehem, which the Philistines therefore should not be able to destroy. Lastly, Did David look upon that water as very precious, which was got but with the hazard of these men's blood, and shall not we much more value those benefits, for the purchasing of which our blessed Saviour shed his blood? Let us not undervalue the blood of the covenant, as they do that undervalue the blessings of the covenant.

2. The brave actions which two of them did particularly at other times. Abishai slew three hundred men at once, *ver. 18, 19*. Benaiah did many great things: 1. He slew two Moabites that were lion like men, so bold and strong, so fierce and furious. 2. He slew a lion in a pit, either in his own defence, as Sampson, or, perhaps, in kindness to the country, a lion that had done mischief: It being in a time of snow, he was more stiff, and the lion more fierce and ravenous, and yet he mastered him. 3. He slew an Egyptian, on what occasion it is not said, he was well fet, and well armed, Benaiah attacked him with no other weapon but a walking staff, dextrously wrested his spear out of his hand and slew him with it, *ver. 21*. For these, and the like exploits, David preferred him to be captain of the life guard, or standing forces, *ver. 23*.

3. Inferiour to these second three, but of great note were the thirty one here mentioned by name. *ver. 24. ad fin.* Asahel is the first, who was slain by Abner in the beginning of David's reign, but lost not his place in his catalogue. Elhanan is the next, brother to Eleazar, one of the first three, *ver. 9*. The surnames here given them are taken, as it should seem, from the places of their birth, or habitation, as many surnames with us originally were. From all parts of the nation, the most wise and valiant were picked up to serve the king. Several of these here named, we find captains of the twelve courses, which David appointed, one for each month of the year, *1 Chron. xxvii*. They that did worthily, were preferred according to their merits. One of them was the son of Ahithophel, *ver. 34*. the son famous in the camp, as the father at the council board. But to find Uriah the Hittite bringing up the rear of these worthies, as it revives the remembrance of David's sin, so it aggravates it, that a man, who deserved so well of his king and country, should be so ill treated. Joab is not mentioned among all these, either 1. Because he was so big that he did not need to be mentioned; the first of the first three, far chief among the captains but Joab was over them as general. Or, 2. Because he was so bad that he did not deserve to be mentioned; for though he was confessed a great soldier, and one that had so much religion in him, as to dedicate of his spoils to the house of God, *1 Chron. xxvi. 28*. yet he lost as much honour by slaying two of David's friends, as ever he got by slaying his enemies.

Christ the son of David has worthies too, who, like David's, are influenced by his example, fight his battles against the spiritual enemies of his kingdom; and in his strength are more than conquerors. Christ's apostles were his immediate attendants, did and suffered great things for him, and at length came to reign with him. They are mentioned with honour in the New Testament, as these in the Old, especially, *Rev. xxi. 14*. nay, all the good soldiers of Jesus Christ, have their names better preserved, than even these worthies have; for they are written in heaven. This honour have all his faithfuls.

C H A P. XXIV.

The last words of David, which we read in the chapter before were admirably good, but in this chapter we read of some of his last works, which were none of the best; yet he repented, and did his first works again, and so he finished well. We have here, (1.) His sin, which was numbering the people in the pride of his heart, ver. 1,--9. (2.) His conviction of the sin, and repentance for it, ver. 10. (3.) The judgment inflicted upon him for it, ver. 11,--15. (4.) The staying of the judgment, ver. 15,--17. (5.) The erecting of an altar in token of God's reconciliation to him and his people, ver. 18,--25.

1. **A**ND again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them, to say, Go number Israel and Judah. 2. For the king said to Joab the captain of the host, which *was* with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, and number ye the people, that I may know the number of the people. 3. And Joab said unto the king, Now the LORD thy God add unto the people (how many soever they be) an hundred-fold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing? 4. Notwithstanding, the king's word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host: and Joab and the captains of the host went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel. 5. ¶ And they passed over Jordan, and pitched in Aroer, on the right side of the city that lieth in the midst of the river of Gad, and toward

Jazer. 6. Then they came to Gilead, and to the land of Tahtim-hodshi; and they came to Dan-jaan, and about to Zidon. 7. And came to the strong hold of Tyre, and to all the cities of the Hivites, and of the Canaanites: and they went out to the south of Judah, *even* to Beer-sheba. 8. So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. 9. And Joab gave up the sum of the number of the people unto the king: and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men that drew the sword; and the men of Judah *were* five hundred thousand men.

Here is, 1. The orders which David gave to Joab to number the people of Israel and Judah; *ver. 1, 2*. Two things here seem strange,

1. The sinfulness of this. What harm was there in it? Did not Moses twice number the people without any crime? Doth not political arithmetick come in among other the policies of a prince? Should not the shepherd know the number of his sheep? Doth not the son of David know all his own by name? Might not he make good use of this calculation? What evil has he done, if he do this? *A*. It is certain it was a sin, and a great sin; but where the evil of it lay is not so certain. 1. Some think the fault was, that he numbered them that were under twenty years old, if they were but of stature and strength able to bear arms: And that was the reason why this account was not enrolled, because it was illegal, *1 Chron. xxvii. 23, 24*. 2. Others think the fault was, that he did not require the half-shekel, which was to be paid for the service of the sanctuary, whenever the people were numbered, as a ransom for their souls, *Exod. xxx. 12*. 3. Others think he did it with a design to impose a tribute upon them for himself, and to be put into his treasury; this by way of poll, which, when he knew their numbers, he could tell what it would amount to: but nothing of this appears, nor was David ever a raiser of taxes. 4. This was the fault, that he had no orders from God to do it, nor was there any occasion for the doing of it. It was a needless trouble both to himself and to his people. 5. Some think that it was an affront to the ancient promise which God made to Abraham, that his seed should be innumerable as the dust of the earth, it favoured of distrust of that promise, or a design to shew that it was not fulfilled in the letter of it: He would number those of whom God had said, that they could not be numbered. Those know not what they do, that go about to disprove the word of God. 6. That which was the worst thing, in numbering the people, was, that David did it in the pride of his heart, which was Hezekiah's sin in shewing his treasures to the ambassadors. (1.) It was a proud conceit of his own greatness, in having the command of so numerous a people, as if their increase had been owing to any conduct of his, which was to be ascribed purely to the blessing of God. (2.) It was a proud confidence in his own strength. By publishing among the nations the number of his people, he thought to appear the more formidable; and doubted not if he should have any war, but to over-power his enemies with the multitude of his forces; trusting in an arm of flesh, more than he should have done, who had written so much of trusting in God only. God judges not of sin as we do: What appears to us harmless, or at least but a small offence, may be a great sin in the eye of God, who sees men's principles, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart: But his judgment, we are sure, is according to truth.

2. The spring from which it is here said to arise, is yet more strange, *ver. 1*. It is not strange that *the anger of the Lord should be kindled against Israel*, there was cause enough for it, they were unthankful for the blessings of David's government, and strangely drawn in to take part with Absalom first, and afterwards with Sheba; we have reason to think, that their peace and plenty made them secure and sensual, and for this God was displeased with them; but that in this displeasure he should move David to number the people is very strange. We are sure that God is not the author of sin; he tempts no man: we are told *1 Chron. xxi. 1*. that *Satan provoked David to number Israel*; Satan, as an enemy, suggested it for a sin, as he put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ: God, as righteous Judge, permitted it, with a design, from this sin of David, to take an occasion to punish other sins of Israel, which he might justly have punished them for without this. But as before he brought a famine upon them for the sin of Saul, so now a pestilence for the sin of David; that princes may, from these instances, learn, when the judgments of God are abroad, to suspect that their sins are the ground of the controversy, and may therefore repent and reform themselves, which should have a great influence upon national repentance and reformation. And that people may learn to pray for those in authority, that God would keep them from sin, because if they sin the kingdom smarts.

2. The opposition which Joab made to these orders. Even he was aware of David's folly and vain glory in this design. He observed that David gave no reason for it, *only number the people, that I may know the number of the people*, and therefore he endeavours to divert his pride, and in a much more decent manner than he had before endeavoured to divert his passion, upon the death of Absalom; then he spoke rudely and insolently, *chap. xix. 5*. but now, as became him, *ver. 3*. *Now the Lord thy God add unto the people a hundred fold*. There is no occasion either to tax them, or list them, or make any distribution of them. They are all easy and happy; and it is his wish, both

both that their number might increase, and that the king, though old, might live to see it, and have the satisfaction of it. *But why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?* What need is there of doing it? *Pauperis est numerare pecus.* Especially, why should David, who used to speak so much of delighting in God, and in the exercises of devotion, and who, being old, one would think should have put away childish things, take a pleasure (so he calls it modestly, but means taking a pride) in a thing of this nature. Note, Many things, not in themselves sinful, turn into sin to us, by our inordinate delighting in them. Joab was aware of David's vanity herein, but he himself was not. It would be good for us to have a friend that would faithfully admonish us, when we say or do any thing proud or vain-glorious, because we oft do so, and are not our selves aware of it.

3. The orders executed notwithstanding. *The king's word prevailed,* ver. 4. he would have it done; Joab must not gainsay it, lest he be thought to grudge his time and pains in the king's service. It is an unhappiness to great men to have those about them that will aid them and serve them in that which is evil. Joab, according to order, applied himself, with some reluctancy, to this unpleasing task, and took the captains of the host to help him. They began in the most distant places; in the east first, on the other side Jordan, ver. 5. then they went towards Dan in the north, ver. 6. so to Tyre on the east; and thence to Beer-sheba in the south, ver. 7. Above nine months were spent in taking this account, a great deal of trouble and amazement was given by it to the country, ver. 8. and the sum total was at length brought to the king at Jerusalem, ver. 9. whether the numbers answered David's expectation or no, we are not told, nor whether the account fed his pride, or mortified it. They were very many, but, it may be, not so many as he thought they were. They had not increased in Canaan as they had in Egypt, nor were much more than double to what they were when they came into Canaan under Joshua, about four hundred years before, yet it is an evidence that Canaan was a very fruitful land, that so many thousands were maintained within so narrow a compass.

10. ¶ And Davids heart smote him, after that he had numbred the people: and David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. 11. For when David was up in the morning, the word of the LORD came unto the prophet Gad, Davids seer, saying, 12. Go and say unto David, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. 13. So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me. 14. And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD, (for his mercies are great) and let me not fall into the hand of man. 15. So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel, from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beer-sheba, seventy thousand men. 16. And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing-place of Araunah the Jebusite. 17. And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my fathers house.

We have here David repenting of the sin, and yet punished for it; God repenting of the judgment, and David thereby made more penitent.

1. Here is David's penitent reflection upon, and confession of his sin in numbring the people. While the thing was in doing, during all those nine months, we do not find that David was sensible of his sin, for then he would have countermanded the orders he had given, but when the account was finished and laid before him, presently, that very night, his conscience was awakened, and he felt the pain of it, just then when he promised himself the pleasure of it. When he was about to feast on the satisfaction of the numbers of his people, it was turned into the gall of asps within him; sense of the sin cast a damp upon the joy, ver. 10. 1. He was convinced of his sin; *his heart smote him*, before the prophet came to him, (I think it should not be read *for*, ver. 11. but, *and when David was up*, so it is in the original) his conscience shewed him the evil of what he had done, now it appeared sin, and exceeding sinful, which before he saw no harm in. He reflected upon it with great regret, and his heart reproached him for it. Note, It is a good thing when a man has sinned, to have a heart within him to smite him for it; it is a good sign

of a principle of grace in the heart; and a good step towards repentance and reformation. 2. He confessed it to God, and begged earnestly for the forgiveness of it. (1.) He owns he had sinned, sinned greatly, though to others it might seem no sin at all, or a very little one. True penitents, whose consciences are tender and well informed, see that evil in sin which others do not see. (2.) He owns he had *done foolishly, very foolishly*, because he had done it in the pride of his heart; and it was folly for him to be proud of the numbers of his people, when they were God's people, not his; and as many as they were God could soon make them fewer. (3.) He cries to God for pardon; *I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant, If we confess our sins*; we may pray in faith that God *will forgive them*, and take away, by pardoning mercy, that iniquity which we cast away by sincere repentance.

2. The just and necessary correction which he was taken under for this sin. David had been full of tossings to and fro all night under the sense of his sin, no rest in his bones because of it, *and he arose in the morning*, expecting to hear of God's displeasure against him for what he had done; or designing to speak with Gad his seer concerning it: he is called his seer, because he had him always at hand to advise with in the things of God, and made use of him as his confessor and counsellor; but God prevented him, and directed the prophet Gad what to say to him, ver. 11. and it is taken for granted, 1. That David must be corrected for this fault; it is too great a crime, and reflects too much dishonour upon God; to go unpunished; even in David himself, of the seven things that God hates; pride is the first, *Prov. vi. 17.* Note, Those who truly repent of their sins, and have them pardoned, yet are often made to smart for them in this world. 2. The punishment must answer the sin. He was proud of the numbers of his people, and therefore the judgment he must be chastised with for this sin, must be such as will make them fewer. Note, What we make the matter of our pride, it is just with God to take it from us, or imbitter it to us, and some way or other to make it the matter of our punishment. 3. It must be such a punishment as the people must have a large share in, *for God's anger was kindled against Israel*, ver. 1: though it was David's sin that immediately plucked up the sluice, the sins of the people all contributed to the deluge.

Now as to the punishment that must be inflicted,

1. David is bid to choose what rod he will be beaten with; ver. 12, 13. his heavenly Father must correct him, but to shew that he doth not do it willingly, he gives David leave to make choice whether it shall be by war, famine, or pestilence, three sore judgments, and which greatly weaken and diminish a people: God, by putting him thus to his choice, designed, 1. To humble him the more for his sin, which he would see to be exceeding sinful, when he came to consider each of these judgments as exceeding dreadful. 2. To upbraid him with the proud conceit he had of his own sovereignty over Israel: he that is so great a prince, begins to think he may have what he will, Come, saith God, then which wilt thou have of these three things? Compare *Jer. xxxiv. 17. I proclaim a liberty for you*, but it is such a liberty as this of David's, *to the sword, to the pestilence; and to the famine*; and *Jer. xv. 2. Such as are for death to death.* Or, 3. To give him some encouragement under the correction, letting him know that God did not cast him out of communion with himself, but that still his secret was with him, and in afflicting him, he considered his frame, and what he could best bear. Or, 4. That he might the more patiently bear the rod, when it was a rod of his own chusing. The prophet bids him advise with himself, and then tell him what answer he should return to him that sent him. Note, Ministers are sent of God to us, and they must give an account of the success of their embassy; it concerns us therefore to consider, what answer they shall return from us, that they may give up their account of us with joy.

2. He excepts only against the judgment of the sword, and for the other two he refers himself to God, but intimates his choice of the pestilence rather, ver. 14. *I am in a great strait*; and well he might, *when fear and the pit, and the snare, are before him*, and if he escape one, he inevitably falls into the other, *Jer. xlviii. 43, 44.* Note, Sin brings men into straits: wise and good men oft distress themselves by their own folly. Now, 1. He begs he may *not fall into the hand of man*; whatever comes, *let us not flee three months before our enemies*, that will fully all the glory of David's triumphs, and give occasion to the enemies of God and Israel *to behave themselves proudly.* See *Deut. xxxii. 26, 27.* Their tender mercies are cruel, and in three months they will do that damage to the nation, which many years will not repair. But, 2. He casts himself upon God; *Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are great.* Men are God's hand, so they are called, *Psal. xvii. 14.* the sword of his sending, yet there are some judgments which come more immediately from his hand than others, as famine and pestilence, and which of these shall be the scourge he refers it to God, who chooseth the shortest, that he might the sooner testify his being reconciled. But some think, David, by these words, chose the pestilence. The land had not yet recovered the famine, under which it smarted three years upon the Gibeonites account, and therefore let us not be corrected with that rod, for that also will be the triumph of our neighbours, hence we read of *the reproach of famine*, *Ezek. xxxvi. 30.* but, if Israel must be diminished, let it be by the pestilence, for that is *falling into the hands of the Lord*, who uses to inflict that judgment by the hand of his own immediate servants, the angels, as in the death of the first-born

born of Egypt. That is a judgment to which David himself, and his own family, lie as open as the meanest subject, but not so either to famine or pestilence, and therefore David, in conscience of his guilt, chooseth that. Sword and famine will devour one as well as another, but it may be thought the destroying angel will draw his sword against those who are known to God to be most guilty. This will be of the shortest continuance, and he dreads the thought of lying long under the tokens of God's displeasure. *It is a dreadful thing*, the apostle saith, *to fall into the hands of the living God*, Heb. x. 31. a fearful thing indeed for sinners that have, by their impenitency, shut themselves out from all hope of his mercy: but David, a penitent, dares cast himself into God's hand, knowing he shall find that *his mercies are great*. Good men, even when they are under God's frowns, yet will entertain no other but good thoughts of him: *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him*.

3. A pestilence is accordingly sent, *ver. 15*. which, for the extent of it, spread from Dan to Beer-sheba, from one end of the kingdom to the other, which shews it to come immediately from God's hand, and not from any natural causes: David has his choice, he suffers by miracle, and not by ordinary means. For the continuance of it, it lasted from morning (this very morning that it was put to David's choice) to the time appointed, *i. e.* to the third day, so Mr. Pool; or only to the evening of the first day, the time appointed for the evening sacrifice, so bishop Patrick, and others, who reckon that the pestilence lasted but nine hours, and that, in compassion to David, God shortened the time he had first mentioned. The execution the pestilence did was very severe, *there died seventy thousand men*, that were all well, and sick, and dead, in a few hours. What a great cry, may we suppose, was there now throughout all the land of Israel, as there was in Egypt when the first-born were slain: but that was at midnight, this in the day-time, *Psalms xci. 6*. See the power of the angels, when God gives them commission, either to save or to destroy: Joab is nine months in passing with his pen, the angel but nine hours in passing with his sword, through all the coasts and corners of the land of Israel. See how easily God can take the proudest sinners by the throat, and bring them down, and how much we owe daily to the divine patience. David's adultery is punished for the present only with the death of one infant, his pride with the death of all those thousands, so much doth God hate pride. The number slain amounts almost to a half-decimation; seventy thousand was about one in twenty: now, we may suppose, David's flesh trembled for fear of God, and he was afraid of his judgments, *Psalms cxix. 120*.

(3.) God's gracious relaxation of the judgment, when it began to be inflicted upon Jerusalem, *ver. 16*. *The angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem*, as if he intended to do greater execution there than any where else, even to destroy it; the country had drunk of the bitter cup, but Jerusalem must drink the dregs: it should seem, that was last numbered, and therefore was reserved to be last plagued; perhaps, there was more wickedness, especially more pride, (and that was the sin now chastised) in Jerusalem than elsewhere, therefore the hand of the destroyer is stretched out upon that: but then *the Lord repented him of the evil*, changed not his mind, but his way, and said to the destroying angel, *it is enough, stay now thine hand, and let mercy rejoice against judgment*. Jerusalem shall be spared for the ark's sake, for it is the place God hath chosen to put his name there. See here how ready God is to forgive, and how little pleasure he takes in punishing, and let it encourage us to meet him by repentance in the way of his judgments. This was on mount Moriah. Dr. Lightfoot observes, that in the very place where Abraham, by a countermand from heaven, was stayed from slaying his son, this angel, by a like countermand, was stayed from destroying Jerusalem. It is for the sake of the great sacrifice that our forfeited lives are preserved from the destroying angel.

(4.) David's renewed repentance for his sin upon this occasion, *ver. 17*. he saw the angel, God opening his eyes for that purpose, saw his sword stretched out to destroy, a flaming sword; saw him ready to sheath it, upon the orders given him to stay proceedings; seeing this he spoke (not to the angel, he knew better things than to address himself to the servant, in the presence of the master, or to give that honour to the creature, which is the Creator's due) but to the Lord, and said, *Lo, I have sinned*. Note, True penitents, the more they perceive of God's sparing, pardoning mercy, the more humbled they are for sin, and the more resolved against it. *They shall be ashamed when I am pacified towards them*, *Ezek. xvi. 63*. Observe, 1. How he lays load upon himself, as if he could never speak bad enough of his own fault; *I have sinned, and I have done wickedly*, mine is the crime, and therefore on me be the cross; *Let thy hand be against me, and my father's house*; I am the sinner, let me be the sufferer, so willing was he to accept of the punishment of his iniquity, though he was worth ten thousand of them. 2. How he intercedes for the people, whose bitter lamentations made his heart to ache, and his ears to tingle; *these sheep, what have they done? Done! Why they had done much amiss*, it was their sin that provoked God to leave David to himself to do as he did, yet, as became a penitent, he is severe upon his own faults, while he extenuates theirs. Most people, when God's judgments are abroad, charge others with being the cause of them, and care not who falls by them, so they can escape; but David's penitent and publick spirit was otherwise affected. Let this mind us of the grace of our Lord Jesus, who gave himself for our sins, was willing God's hand should be against him, that we

might escape. The shepherd was smitten that the sheep might be spared.

18. ¶ And Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the LORD, in the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite. 19. And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up, as the LORD commanded. 20. And Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming on toward him: and Araunah went out and bowed himself before the king on his face upon the ground. 21. And Araunah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant? And David said, To buy the threshing-floor of thee to build an altar unto the LORD, that the plague may be stayed from the people. 22. And Araunah said unto David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him: behold, here be oxen for burnt-sacrifice, and threshing-instruments, and other instruments of the oxen for wood. 23. All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king: and Araunah said unto the king, The LORD thy God accept thee. 24. And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the LORD my God, of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing-floor and the oxen, for fifty shekels of silver. 25. And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt-offerings, and peace-offerings: so the LORD was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.

Here is, 1. A command sent to David to erect an altar in the place where he saw the angel, *ver. 18*. This was to intimate to David, 1. That, upon his repeated submission and humiliation, God was now thoroughly reconciled to him, *for if the Lord had been pleased to kill him, he would not have accepted an offering*, and therefore would not have ordered him to build an altar. God's encouraging us to offer to him spiritual sacrifices, is a comfortable evidence of his reconciling us to himself. 2. That peace is made between God and sinners by sacrifice, and not otherwise, even by Christ the great propitiation, of whom all the legal sacrifices were types. It is for his sake that the destroying angel is bid to stay his hand. 3. That when God's judgments are graciously stayed, we ought to acknowledge it with thankfulness to his praise. This altar was to be for thank-offerings. See *Isa. xii. 1*.

2. The purchase which David made of the ground in order hereunto. It seems, the owner was a Jebusite, Araunah by name, proselyted, no doubt, to the Jewish religion, though by birth a Gentile, and therefore allowed not only to dwell among the Israelites, but to have a possession of his own in a city, *Lev. xxv. 29, 30*. The piece of ground was a threshing-floor, a mean place, yet thus dignified; a place of labour, therefore thus dignified. Now, 1. David went in person to the owner to treat with him. See his justice, that he would not so much as use it in the present exigence, though the proprietor was an alien, though himself was a king, and though he had express orders from God to rear an altar there, till he had bought it, and paid for it. *God hates robbery for burnt-offering*. See his humility, how far he was from taking state, though a king, he was now a penitent, and therefore, in token of his self-abasement, he neither sent for Araunah to come to him, nor sent another to deal with him, but went himself, *ver. 19*. and though it looked like a diminution of himself, he lost no honour by it; Araunah, when he saw him, went and bowed himself to the ground before him, *ver. 20*. Great men will be never the less respected for their humility, but the more.

(2.) Araunah, when he understood his business, *ver. 21*. generously offered him, not only the ground to build his altar on, but *oxen for sacrifices*, and other things that might be of use to him in the service, *ver. 22*. and all this gratis, and a good prayer into the bargain; *The Lord thy God accept thee!* This he did, 1. Because he had a generous spirit with a great estate. *He gave as a king*, *ver. 23*. though an ordinary subject, he had the spirit of a prince. In the Hebrew it is, *He gave, even the king to the king*, whence it is supposed that Araunah had been king of the Jebusites in that place; or was descended from their royal family, though now a tributary to David. 2. Because he had a great honour for David, though his conqueror, upon the score of his personal merits, and never thought he could do too much to oblige him. 3. Because he had an affection to Israel, and earnestly desired, that *the plague might be stayed*, and the honour of its being stayed at *his threshing floor*, he would account a valuable consideration for all he now tendered to David.

(3.) David resolves to pay the full value of it, and doth so, *ver. 24*. Here were two generous souls well met. Araunah is very willing to give: but David is determined to buy, and for a good reason, he will not offer that to God, which cost him nothing. He would not take advantage of the pious Jebusite's generosity to sponge upon him, thanks him, no doubt, for his kind offer, but pays him now *fifty shekels of silver*, for the floor and the oxen, for the present service; and afterwards six hundred shekels of gold for the ground adjoining, to build the temple on. Note, Those know not what religion is, all whose care it is to make it cheap and easy to themselves, and

and are best pleased with that which costs them least of pains or expence. What have we our substance for, but to honour God with it, and how can it be better bestowed?

3. The building of the altar, and the offering of the proper sacrifices upon it, *ver.* 25. Burnt-offerings, to the glory of God's justice in the execution that had been done; and peace-offerings, to the glory of his mercy in the seasonable staying of the process. Hereupon

God shewed (it is supposed, by fire from heaven consuming the sacrifices) that *he was intreated for the land*, and that it was in mercy that the plague was removed, and in token of God's being reconciled both to prince and people. Christ is our altar, our sacrifice, in him alone we may expect to find favour with God, to escape his wrath, and the sword, the flaming sword of that cherubim, which *keeps the way of the tree of life*.

The end of the second book of SAMUEL.

A N E X P O S I T I O N Of the First BOOK of K I N G S, With Practical Observations.

Many Histories are books of Kings and their reigns, to which the affairs of their kingdoms are reduced; it is a piece of honour that has commonly been paid to crowned heads: the holy Scripture is the history of the kingdom of God among men, under the several administrations of it: but there the King is one, and his Name one. The particular history now before us accounts for the affairs of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, yet with special regard to the Kingdom of God among them, for still it is a sacred History much more instructive and not less entertaining than any of the histories of the kings of the earth; to which (those of them that are of any certainty) it is prior in time; for though there were kings in Edom before there were any king in Israel, *Gen.* xxxvi. 31. foreigners in that point of state got the precedency; yet the history of the kings of Israel lives and will live in holy Writ to the end of the world, when that of the kings of Edom is long since buried in oblivion: for the honour that comes from God is durable, while the honour of the world is like a mushroom, which comes up in a night and perishes in a night. ---- The Bible began with the story of Patriarchs, and Prophets, and Judges, men whose converse with heaven was more immediate, the record of which strengthens our faith, but it is not so easily accommodated to our case, now we expect not visions, as the subsequent history of affairs like ours, under the direction of common providence; and here also we find, though not many types and figures of the Messiah, yet great expectations of him, for not only prophets but kings desired to see the great mysteries of the Gospel, *Luke* x. 24. ---- The two books of Samuel are introductions to the books of the Kings, as they relate the original of the royal government in Saul, and of the royal family in David. These two books give us an account of David's successor, Solomon, the division of his kingdom, and the succession of the several kings both of Judah and Israel, with an abstract of their history down to the captivity. And as from the book of Genesis we may collect excellent rules of æconomicks, for the good governing of families; so from these books, of politicks, for the directing of publick affairs. ---- There is in these books special regard had to the house and lineage of David, from which Christ came. ---- Some of his sons trod in his steps, and others did not. The characters of the kings of Judah may be thus briefly given. David the devout, Solomon the wise, Rehoboam the simple, Abishai the valiant, Asa the upright, Jehoshaphat the religious, Jehoram the wicked, Ahaziah the prophane, Joash the backslider, Amaziah the rash, Uzziah the mighty, Jotham the peaceable, Ahaz the idolater, Hezekiah the reformer, Manasseh the penitent, Amon the obscure, Josiah the tenderhearted, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, all wicked, and such as brought ruin presently on themselves and their kingdom. ---- The number of the good and bad is pretty near equal, but the reigns of the good were generally long, those of the bad short. The consideration of which will make the state of Israel not altogether so bad in this period as at first it seems. In this first Book we have, 1. The death of David, chap. i and ii. 2. The glorious reign of Solomon, and his building the temple, chap. iii. ---x. but the cloud his sun set under, chap. xi. 3. The division of the kingdoms in Rehoboam, and his reign and Jeroboam's, chap. xii. ---xiv. 4. The reigns of Abijah and Asa over Judah, Baasha and Omri over Israel, chap. xv. and xvi. 5. Elijah's miracles, chap. xvii, xviii, xix. 6. Ahab's success against Benhadad, his wickedness and fall, chap. xx, ---xxii. And in all this history it appears; that kings, though gods to us, are men to God, mortal and accountable.

C H A P. I.

In this chapter we have, (1.) David declining in his health, *ver.* 1, ---4. (2.) Adonijah aspiring to the kingdom, and treating his party in order to it, *ver.* 5, ---10. (3.) Nathan and Bathsheba contriving to secure the succession to Solomon, and prevailing for an order from David for that purpose, *ver.* 11, ---31. 4. The anointing of Solomon accordingly, and the peoples joy therein, *ver.* 32, ---40. (5.) The effectual stop this gave to Adonijah's usurpation, and the dispersion of his party thereupon, *ver.* 1, ---49. (6.) Solomon's dismissal of Adonijah upon his good behaviour, *ver.* 50, ---53.

1. **N**OW king David was old, and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat. 2. Wherefore his servants said unto him; Let there be sought for my lord the king, a young virgin, and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat. 3. So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunamite, and brought her to the king. 4. And the damsel was very fair,

fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not.

David in the foregoing chapter, had, by the great mercy of God, escaped the sword of the destroying angel; but our deliverances from, or through diseases and dangers are but reprieves; if the candle be not blown out, it will burn out of itself. We have David here sinking under the infirmities of old age, and brought by them to the gates of the grave. *He that cometh up out of the pit shall fall into the snare; and one way or other we must needs die.*

1. It would trouble one to see David so infirm. He was old, and his natural heat so wasted, that no clothes could keep him warm, *ver. 1.* David had been a valiant active man, and a man of business, and very vehement had the flame always been in his breast; and yet now his blood is chilled and stagnated, he is confined to his bed, and there can get no heat. He was now 70 years old: Many at that age are as lively and fit for business as ever; but David was now chastised for his former sins, especially that in the matter of Uriah, and felt from his former toils, and the hardships he had gone through in his youth, which then he made nothing of, but now was the worse for. *Let not the strong man glory in his strength,* which may soon be weakened by sickness, or at last will be weakened by old age. Let young people *remember their Creator in the days of their youth,* before these evil days come. What our hand finds to do for God, and our souls, and our generation, let us do it with all our might, because the night comes, the night of old age, in which no man can work; and when our strength is gone, it will be a comfort to remember we used it well.

2. It would trouble one to see his physicians so weak and unskilful, that they knew no other way of relieving him, but by outward applications: No cordials, no spirits, but, 1. They *covered him with clothes,* which, where there is any inward heat, will keep it in, and so increase it; but where it is not, they have none to communicate, no, not royal clothing. Elihu makes it a difficulty to understand *how our garments are warm upon us,* Job xxxvii. 17. but if God deny his blessing, men *clothe them,* and there is none warm, Hag. i. 6. David here was not. 2. They ordered him a young bed-fellow, *ver. 2, 3, 4.* A foolish project it was, to prescribe nuptials to one that should rather have been preparing for his funeral; but they knew what would gratify their own corruptions, and, perhaps, were too willing to gratify his, under colour of consulting his health; his prophets should have been consulted as well as his physicians, in an affair of this nature. However, this might be excused then, when even good men ignorantly allowed themselves in having of many wives. We now have not so learned of Christ, but are taught, that one man must have but one wife, *Matth. xix. 5.* And that farther, *It is not for a man to touch a woman,* 1 Cor. vii. 1. That Abishag was married to David before she lay with him, and was his secondary wife, appears by the imputation of it as a great crime to Adonijah, that he desired to marry her (*chap. ii. 22.*) after his father's death.

5. ¶ Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. 6. And his father had not displeased him at any time, in saying, Why hast thou done so? and he also *was a very goodly man;* and his mother bare him after Absalom. 7. And he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah, and with Abiathar the priest: and they following Adonijah, helped him. 8. But Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and Nathan the prophet, and Shimei, and Rei, and the mighty men which *belonged* to David, were not with Adonijah. 9. And Adonijah slew sheep, and oxen, and fat cattle, by the stone of Zoheleth, which *is* by En-rogel, and called all his brethren the kings sons, and all the men of Judah the kings servants. 10. But Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, and the mighty men, and Solomon his brother he called not.

David had had much affliction in his children; Amnon and Absalom, had both been his grief; the one his first born, the other his third (2 Sam. iii. 2, 3.) his second, whom he had by Abigail, we will suppose he had comfort in; his fourth was Adonijah, (2 Sam. iii. 4.) he was one of those that was born in Hebron; we have heard nothing of him till now, and here we are told, that he was a pretty comely gentleman, and that he was next in age, and (as it is proved) next in temper, to Absalom, *ver. 6.* And farther, that in his father's eyes he had been a jewel, but was now a thorn.

1. His father had made a fondling of him, *ver. 6.* He had not displeased him at any time. It is not said he never displeased his father; it is likely he had done so many a time, and his father was secretly troubled at his miscarriages, and lamented them before God: But his father had not displeased him, either by crossing him in his humours, or denying him any thing he had a mind of, or by calling him to an account what he had done, and where he had been,

or by keeping him to his book or his business, or reproving him for what he saw or heard of, that he did amiss; he never said to him, why hast thou done so? because he saw it was uneasy to him, and he could not bear it, without fretting. It was the son's fault that he was displeased at reproof, and took it for an affront, whereby he lost the benefit of it: And it was the father's fault, that, because he saw it displeased him, he did not reprove him; and now he justly smarted for indulging him.—They that honour their sons more than God, as they do who keep them not under a good discipline, thereby forfeit the honour they might expect from their sons.

2. He in return made a fool of his father: because he was old and confined to his bed, he thought no notice was to be taken of him, and therefore *exalted himself,* and said, *I will be king,* *ver. 5.* Children that are indulged, learn to be proud and ambitious, and that is the ruin of a great many young people: The way to keep them humble, is to keep them under.—Observe Adonijah's influence. 1. He looks upon the days of mourning for his father to be at hand, and therefore he prepares to succeed him, though he knew that by the designation both of God and David, Solomon was to be the man, for publick notice had been given of it by David himself, and the succession settled as it were by act of parliament, in pursuance of God's appointment, 1 Chron. xxii. 9.—xxiii. 1. This entail Adonijah attempted by force to cut off, in contempt, both of God and his father. Thus is the kingdom of Christ opposed, and there are those that say, we will not have him to reign over us. 2. He looks upon his father as superannuated, and good for nothing, and therefore he enters immediately upon the possession of the throne: He cannot wait till his father's head be laid, but it must now be said, Adonijah reigns, *ver. 18.* and God save king Adonijah, *ver. 25.* His father is not fit to govern, for he is old, and past it; nor Solomon, for he is young, and not come to it; and therefore Adonijah will take it upon him. It argues a very base and wicked mind for children to insult over their parents, because of the infirmities of their age.

In pursuance of this ambitious prospect, 1. He got a great retinue, *ver. 5.* Chariots and horsemen, both for state and strength; to wait on him, and to fight for him. 2. He made a great interest, with no less than Joab, the general of the army, and Abiathar the high priest, *ver. 7.* That he should make his court to those, who, by their influence in church and camp, were capable of doing him great service, is not strange; but we may well wonder by what arts they could be drawn to follow him, and help him. They were old men, that had been faithful to David, in the most difficult and troublesome of his times; men of sense and experience, that one would think should not easily be wheedled: They could not propose any advantage to themselves by it, for they were both at the top of their preferment, and stood fast in it. They could not be ignorant of the entail of the crown upon Solomon, which it was not in their power to cut off, and whom, therefore it was their interest to oblige: But God in this matter, left them to themselves, perhaps, to correct them for some former miscarriages, with a rod of their own making. We are told, *ver. 8.* who they were, that were of such approved fidelity to David, that Adonijah had not the confidence so much as to propose it to them, Zadok, Benaiah, and Nathan. A man that has given proofs of his resolute adherence to that which is good, shall not be asked to do an ill thing. 3. He prepared a great entertainment, (*ver. 9.*) at En-rogel, not far from Jerusalem; his guests were the king's sons, and the king's servants, whom he feasted and caressed, to bring them over to his party; but Solomon was not invited, either because he despised him, or because he despaired of him, *ver. 10.* Such as serve their own belly, and will be in the interest of those that will feast them, what side soever they are of, are an easy prey to seducers, Rom. xvi. 18. Some think Adonijah slew these sheep and oxen, even fat ones for sacrifice, and that it was a religious feast he made, beginning his usurpation with a shew of devotion, as Absalom, under a colour of a vow, 2 Sam. xv. 7. which he might do the more plausibly, when he had the high-priest himself on his side. It is pity any occasion should ever be given to say, *In nomine domini incipit omne malum;* and that religious exercises should be made to patronize unrighteous practices.

11. ¶ Wherefore Nathan spake unto Bath-sheba the mother of Solomon, saying, Hast thou not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith doth reign, and David our Lord knoweth it not? 12. Now therefore come, let me, I pray thee, give thee counsel, that thou mayest save thine own life, and the life of thy son Solomon. 13. Go, and get thee in unto king David, and say unto him, Didst not thou, my lord, O king, swear unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne? why then doth Adonijah reign? 14. Behold, while thou yet talkest there with the king, I will also come in after thee, and confirm thy words. 15. ¶ And Bath-sheba went in unto the king, into the chamber: and the king was very old; and Abishag the Shuninite ministered

ministred unto the king. 16. And Bath-sheba bowed, and did obeisance unto the king : and the king said, What wouldst thou? 17. And she said unto him, My lord, thou swarest by the LORD thy God unto thine handmaid, *saying*, Assuredly, Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne. 18. And now behold, Adonijah reigneth ; and now my lord the king, thou knowest it not : 19. And he hath slain oxen and fat cattle, and sheep in abundance, and hath called all the sons of the king, and Abiathar the priest, and Joab the captain of the host : but Solomon thy servant he hath not called. 20. And thou, my lord, O king, the eyes of all Israel are upon thee, that thou shouldst tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. 21. Otherwise it shall come to pass, when my lord the king shall sleep with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon shall be counted offenders. 22. ¶ And lo, while she yet talked with the king, Nathan the prophet also came in. 23. And they told the king, saying, Behold, Nathan the prophet. And when he was come in before the king, he bowed himself before the king with his face to the ground. 24. And Nathan said, My lord, O king, hast thou said, Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne? 25. For he is gone down this day, and hath slain oxen, and fat cattle, and sheep in abundance, and hath called all the kings sons, and the captains of the host, and Abiathar the priest ; and behold, they eat and drink before him, and say, God save king Adonijah. 26. But me, *even* me thy servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and thy servant Solomon hath he not called. 27. Is this thing done by my lord the king, and thou hast not shewed it unto thy servant, who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him? 28. ¶ Then king David answered and said, Call me Bath-sheba : and she came into the kings presence, and stood before the king. 29. And the king sware, and said, *As the LORD liveth*, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, 30. Even as I sware unto thee by the LORD God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead ; even so will I certainly do this day. 31. Then Bath-sheba bowed with *her* face to the earth, and did reverence to the king, and said, Let my lord king David live for ever.

We have here the effectual endeavours that were used by Nathan and Bath-sheba, to obtain from David a ratification of Solomon's succession, for the crushing of Adonijah's usurpation. 1. David himself knew not of what was in doing. Disobedient children think they are well enough, if they can but keep their good old parents ignorant of their ill courses ; but a *bird of the air will carry the voice*. 2. Bath-sheba lived retired, and knew nothing of it neither, till Nathan informed her. Many get very comfortably through this world, that know little how the world goes. 3. Solomon, it is likely knew of it, but was a deaf man that heard not. Though he had years, and wisdom above his years, yet we do not find that he stirred to oppose Adonijah, but quietly composed himself, and left it to God and his friends to order the matter. Hence David in his Psalm, for Solomon observes, that while men in pursuit of the world in vain, *rise early and sit up late*, God giveth his beloved (his Jedidiah's) *sleep*, in giving them to be easy, and gain their point without ado, *Psal. cxxvii. 1, 2*. How then is the design brought about?

1. Nathan the prophet alarms Bath-sheba, possesseth her with the case, and puts her in a way to get an order from the king, for the confirming of Solomon's title. He was concerned, because he knew God's mind, and David's, and Israel's interest, it was by him that God had named Solomon Jedidiah, *2 Sam. xii. 25*. and therefore he could not sit still and see the throne usurped, which he knew was his right, by the will of him, from whom promotion cometh. When crowns were disposed of by immediate direction from heaven, no marvel, that prophets were so much interested and employed in that matter ; but now it is common providence that rules the affairs of the kingdom of men, *Dan. iv. 32*. the subordinate agency must be left to common persons, and let not prophets intermeddle in them, but keep to the affairs of the kingdom of God among men.—Nathan applies himself to Bath-sheba, as one that had the greatest concern for Solomon, and could have the freest access to David. He acquaints her with Adonijah's attempt, *ver. 11*. and that it was not with David's consent or privy. He suggests to her, that not only Solomon was in danger of losing the crown, but that he and she too, were in danger of losing their

No. 24.

lives, if Adonijah prevailed. A humble spirit may be indifferent to a crown, and may be content, notwithstanding the prospect of it, to sit down short of the possession of it : But the law of self-preservation, and the sixth commandment, obliges us to use all possible endeavours to secure our own life, and the life of others. Now, saith Nathan, let me give thee counsel how to save thy own life, and the life of thy son, *ver. 12*. Such as this is the counsel that Christ's ministers give us, in his name, to give all diligence, not only that no man take our crown, *Rev. iii. 11*. but that we save our lives, even the lives of our souls.—He directs her, *ver. 13*. to go to the king, to mind him of his word and oath, that Solomon should be his successor, and to ask him, in the most humble manner. *Why doth Adonijah reign?* He thought David was not so cold, but this would warm him. Conscience, as well as sense of honour, would put life into him upon such an occasion as this ; and he promiseth, *ver. 14*. that while she was reasoning with the king upon this matter, he would come in and second her, as if he came accidentally, which, perhaps, the king might look upon as a special providence, (and he was one that took notice of such evidences, *1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33*.) or, however, it would help to awaken him so much the more.

2. Bath-sheba, according to his advice and direction, loses no time, but presently makes her application to the king, on the same errand that Esther came on to king Ahasuerus, to intercede for her life. She needed not wait for a call, as Esther did, she knew she should be welcome at any time ; but it is taken notice of that, when she visited the king, Abishag was ministering to him, *ver. 15*. and Bath-sheba took no displeasure either at him or her for it.—Also, that she bowed, and did obeisance to the king, *ver. 16*. in token of her respect to him, both as her prince and as her husband ; such a genuine daughter of Sarah was she, that obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord. They that would find favour with superiours, must shew them reverence, and be dutiful to those who they expect should be kind to them.—Her address to the king on this occasion is very discreet. 1. She minds him of his promise made to her, and confirmed with a solemn oath that Solomon should succeed him, —*ver. 17*. She knew how fast this would hold such a conscientious man as David was. 2. She informs him of Adonijah's attempt, which he was ignorant of, *ver. 18*. Adonijah reigns in competition with thee for the present, and in contradiction to thy promise for the future. The fault is not thine, for thou knowest it not ; but now thou knowest it, thou wilt, in pursuance of thy promise, take care to suppress it.—She tells him, who were his guests, and who were in his interest, but Solomon thy servant has he not called, which plainly shews he looks upon him as his rival, and aims to undermine him, *ver. 19*. It is not an oversight, but a contempt of the act of settlement, that Solomon is neglected. 3. She pleads, that it was very much in his power to obviate this mischief, *ver. 20*. *The eyes of all Israel are upon thee*, not only as a king, for we cannot suppose it the prerogative of any prince to bequeath his subjects by will, as if they were his goods and chattels, to whom he pleaseth, but as a prophet ; all Israel knew that David was not only himself the anointed of the God of Jacob, but that the spirit of the Lord spake by him, *2 Sam. xxiii. 1, 2* : and therefore waiting for, and depending upon a divine designation, in a matter of such importance, David's word would be an oracle, and a law to them ; this therefore, (saith Bath-sheba) they expect, and it will end the controversy, and effectually quash all Adonijah's pretensions. *A divine sentence is in the lips of the king*. Note, Whatever power, interest, or influence men have, they ought to improve it to the utmost, for the preserving and advancing of the kingdom of the Messiah, of which Solomon's kingdom was a type.—4. She suggests the imminent peril which she and her son would be in, if this matter were not settled in David's life-time, *ver. 21*. If Adonijah prevail, as he is like enough to do, (having Joab the general, and Abiathar the high-priest on his side) unless timely suppressed, Solomon and all his friends will be looked upon as traitors, and dealt with accordingly ; —usurpers are most cruel.—If Adonijah had got into the throne, he would not have dealt so fairly with Solomon, as Solomon did with him.—Those, who against right, force their entrance, it is at their utmost peril whoever stand in their way.

3. Nathan the prophet, according to his promise, seasonably stepped in, and seconded her, while she was speaking, before the king had given his answer, lest, if he had heard Bath-sheba's representation only, his answer should have been dilatory, and only that he would consider of it ; but out of the mouth of two witnesses, two such witnesses, the word would be established, and he would immediately give positive order. The king is told that Nathan the prophet is come to work upon him, and he is sure to be always welcome to the king, especially, when either he is not well, or hath any great affair upon his thoughts, for in either case a prophet will be in a particular manner serviceable to him. Nathan knows he must render honour to whom honour is due, and therefore pays the king the same respect now he finds him sick in bed, that he would have done, if he had found him in his throne, he bowed himself with his face to the ground, *ver. 23*. Now he deals a little more roundly with the king, than Bath-sheba had done, in which his character would support him, and the present languor of the king's spirits, made it necessary they should be

rouzed.

rouzed. 1. He makes the same representation of Adonijah's attempt that Bath-sheba had made, *ver.* 25, 26. adding, that his party were already got to that height of assurance, as to shout, *God save king Adonijah*, as if king David were already dead, taking notice also, that they had not invited him to their feast, *me thy servant has he not called*, thereby intimating, that they resolved not to consult either God or David in the matter, for to them both Nathan was a *secretioribus consiliis*, intimately acquainted with their mind. 2. He makes David sensible how much he was concerned to clear himself from having a hand in it. *Hast thou said, Adonijah shall reign after me*, *ver.* 24. And again, *ver.* 27. *Is this thing done by my lord the king?* If it be, he is not so faithful either to God's word, or to his own, as we all took him to be; if it be not, it is high time we witness against the usurpation, and declare Solomon his successor. ----- If it be, why is not Nathan made acquainted with it, who is not only in general the king's confident, but is particularly concerned in this matter, having been employed to notify to David the mind of God, concerning the succession; but if my lord, the king, knows nothing of the matter, (as certainly he doth not) what daring insolence is Adonijah and his party guilty of! Thus he endeavours to incense David against them, that he might act the more vigorously for the support of Solomon's interest. Note, Good men would do their duty if they were minded of it, and put upon it, and told what occasion there is for them to appear; and those, who thus are their remembrancers do them a real kindness, as Nathan here did to David.

4. David hereupon made a solemn declaration of his firm adherence to his former resolution, that Solomon should be his successor: Bath-sheba is called in, *ver.* 28. and to her, as acting for, and on the behalf of her son, the king gives these fresh assurances.

1. He repeats his former promise and oath, owns that he had *sworn unto her by the Lord God of Israel, that Solomon should reign after him*, *ver.* 30. Though he be old, and his memory begins to fail him, yet he remembers this. Note, An oath is so sacred a thing, that the obligations of it cannot be broken, and so solemn a thing, that the impressions of it, one would think, cannot be forgotten.

2. He ratifies it with another, because the occasion called for it. *As the Lord liveth that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, even so will I certainly do this day*, without dispute, without delay. His form of swearing seems to be what he commonly used on solemn occasions, for we find it, *2 Sam.* iv. 9. And it carries in it, a grateful acknowledgment of the goodness of God to him, in bringing him safe through the many difficulties and hardships which had lain in his way, and, which he now makes mention of to the glory of God, as Jacob, when he lay a dying, *Gen.* xlviii. 16. Thus setting to his seal, from his own experience, that that was true which the Spirit of the Lord spake by him, *Psal.* xxxiv. 22. *The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants*. Dying saints ought to be witnesses for God, and speak of him as they have found. Perhaps, he speaks thus on this occasion, for the encouragement of his son and successor, to trust in God in the distresses he also might meet with.

Bath-sheba receives these assurances, (*ver.* 31.) 1. With great complaisance to the king's person, she did reverence to him, while Adonijah and his party affronted him. 2. With hearty good wishes to the king's health, *let him live*. So far was she from thinking he lived too long, that she prayed he might live for ever, if it were possible, to adorn the crown he wore, and to be a blessing to his people. We should earnestly desire the prolonging of useful lives, however it may be the postponing of any advantages of our own.

32. ¶ And king David said, Call me Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. And they came before the king. 33. The king also said unto them, Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. 34. And let Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, anoint him there king over Israel: and blow ye with the trumpet, and say, God save king Solomon. 35. Then ye shall come up after him, that he may come and sit upon my throne; for he shall be king in my stead: and I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel, and over Judah. 36. And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, and said, Amen: the LORD God of my lord the king say so too. 37. As the LORD hath been with my lord the king, even so be he with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord king David. 38. So Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, went down, and caused Solomon to ride upon king David's mule, and brought him to Gihon. 39. And Zadok the priest took an horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon: and they

blew the trumpet, and all the people said, God save king Solomon. 40. And all the people came up after him, and the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them.

We have here the effectual care David took, both to secure Solomon's right, and to preserve the publick peace, by crushing Adonijah's project in the bud. Observe,

1. The express orders he gave for the proclaiming of Solomon. The persons he intrusted with this great affair, were, Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah, men of power and interest, whom David had always reposed a confidence in, and found faithful to him, and whom Adonijah had past by in his invitation, *ver.* 10. David orders them forthwith, with all the solemnity that might be to proclaim Solomon, they must take with them *the servants of their lord*, the life-guards, and all the servants of the household; they must set Solomon on the mule the king used to ride, for he kept not such stables of horses as his son afterwards did; he appoints them whither to go, *ver.* 33, and *ver.* 34, 35, what to do. 1. Zadok and Nathan, the two ecclesiastical persons, must in God's name anoint him king;—for though he was not the first of his family, as Saul and David were, yet he was a younger son, was made king by divine appointment, and his title was contested, which made it necessary, that hereby it should be settled. This unction was typical of the designation and qualification of the Messiah, or Christ, the anointed one, on whom the spirit, that oil of gladness, was poured without measure, *Heb.* i. 9. *Psal.* lxxxix. 20. And all good christians, being *heirs of the kingdom*, (*Jam.* ii. 5.) do from him *receive the anointing*, *1 John* ii. 27. 2. The great officers, civil and military, are ordered to give publick notice of this, and to express the publick joy upon this occasion, by sound of trumpet, by which the law of Moses directed the gracing of great solemnities; to this must be added, the acclamations of the people, *Let king Solomon live*, let him prosper, let his kingdom be established and perpetuated, and let him long continue in the enjoyment of it; so it had been promised concerning him, *Psal.* lxxii. 15. *He shall live*. 3. They must then bring him in state into the city of David, and he must sit upon the throne of his father, as his substitute now, or vice-roy, to dispatch publick business during his weakness, and be his successor after his death; *he shall be king in my stead*. It would be a great satisfaction to David himself, and to all parties concerned, to have this done presently, that, upon the demise of the king, there might be no dispute, or any ruffle in the publick affairs. David was far from grudging his successor the honour of appearing so in his life-time, and yet, perhaps, was so taken up with his devotions on his sick bed, that if he had not been put in mind of it by others, this great good work, which was so necessary to the publick repose, had been left undone.

2. The great satisfaction which Benaiah in the name of the rest professed in these orders. The king said, Solomon shall reign for me, and reign after me, Amen, (saith Benaiah very heartily) as the king saith, so say we, we are all entirely satisfied in the nomination, and concur in the choice, we give our vote for Solomon, *nemine contradicente*; and since we can bring nothing to pass, much less establish it, without the concurrence of a propitious providence, *The Lord God of my lord the king say so too!* *ver.* 36. This is the language of his faith in that promise of God, on which Solomon's government was founded. If we say as God saith in his word, we may hope that he will say as we say by his providence. To this, he adds a prayer for Solomon, *ver.* 37. That God would be with him as he had been with David, and make his throne greater; he knew David was none of those that envy their children's greatness, and therefore, that he would not be disquieted at this prayer, nor take it as an affront, but would heartily say, Amen to it. The wisest and best man in the world desires his children may be wiser and better than he, for he himself desires to be wiser and better than he is; and wisdom and goodness are true greatness.

3. The immediate execution of these orders, *ver.* 38, 39, 40. No time was lost, but Solomon was brought in state to the place appointed, and there Zadok, (who, though he was not as yet high-priest, was, we may suppose, the Suffragan, the Jews called him the Sagan, or second priest) anointed him, by the direction of Nathan the prophet, and David the king, *ver.* 39. In the tabernacle, where the ark was now lodged, was kept, among other sacred things, the holy oil, for many religious services, thence Zadok took a *horn of oil*, which notes both power and plenty, and therewith anointed Solomon. We do not find that Abiathar pretended to anoint Adonijah, he was made king by a feast, not by an unction; whom God calls, he will qualify, which was signified by the anointing; usurpers had it not. Christ signifies anointed, and he is the king whom God hath *set upon his holy hill of Sion*, according to the decree, *Psal.* ii. 6, 7. Christians also are *made to our God* (and by him) *kings*, and they have an *unction from the holy One*, *1 John* ii. 20.

The people hereupon, express their great joy and satisfaction, in the elevation of Solomon, surrounded him with their Hosannas, *God save king Solomon*, and attended him with their musick and shouts of joy; *ver.* 40. Hereby they declared their concurrence

rence in the choice, and that he was not forced upon them, but cheerfully accepted by them. The power of a prince can be little satisfaction to himself, unless he knows it to be a satisfaction to his people. Every Israelite indeed rejoiceth in the exaltation of the son of David.

41. ¶ And Adonijah and all the guests that *were* with him, heard *it* as they had made an end of eating : and when Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, Wherefore *is* this noise of the city, being in an uproar ? 42. And while he yet spake, behold, Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest came, and Adonijah said unto him, Come in, for thou *art* a valiant man, and bringest good tidings. 43. And Jonathan answered and said to Adonijah, Verily our lord king David hath made Solomon king. 44. And the king hath sent with him Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites, and the Pelathites, and they have caused him to ride upon the kings mule. 45. And Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, have anointed him king in Gihon : and they are come up from thence rejoicing, so that the city rang again : this *is* the noise that ye have heard. 46. And also Solomon sitteth on the throne of the kingdom. 47. And moreover, the kings servants came to bless our lord king David, saying, God make the name of Solomon better than thy name, and make his throne greater than thy throne : and the king bowed himself upon the bed. 48. And also thus said the king, Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel, which hath given *one* to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing *it*. 49. And all the guests that *were* with Adonijah, were afraid, and rose up, and went every man his way. 50. ¶ And Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. 51. And it was told Solomon, saying, Behold, Adonijah feareth king Solomon, for lo, he hath caught hold on the horns of the altar, saying, Let king Solomon swear unto me to day, that he will not slay his servant with the sword. 52. And Solomon said, If he will shew himself a worthy man, there shall not an hair of him fall to the earth : but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die. 53. So king Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar ; and he came and bowed himself to king Solomon : and Solomon said unto him, Go to thine house.

Here is, 1. The tidings of Solomon's inauguration brought to Adonijah, and his party, in the midst of their jollity. — *They had made an end of eating*, and, it should seem, it was a great while before they made an end, for all the affair of Solomon's anointing was ordered, done and finished, while they were at dinner glutting themselves. Thus they who *serve not our Lord Christ*, but oppose him, are commonly such as *serve their own belly*, Rom. xvi. 18. and make *a god of that*, Phil. iii. 19. — Their long feast intimates likewise that they were very secure, and confident of their interest, else they would not have lost so much time. The old world, and Sodom, were *eating and drinking*, secure and sensual, when their destruction came, Luke xvii. 26, &c. — *When they had made an end of eating*, and were preparing themselves to proclaim their king, and bring him in triumph into the city, they *heard the sound of the trumpet*, ver. 41. and a *dreadful sound it was in their ears*, Job xv. 21. — Joab was an old man, and was alarmed at it, apprehending the city to be in an uproar ; but Adonijah is very confident that the messenger, being a *worthy man*, brings good tidings, ver. 42. Usurpers flatter themselves with the hopes of success, and those are commonly least timorous, whose condition is most dangerous. But how can those who do ill things expect to have good tidings ? No, the worthiest men will bring them the worst news, as the priest's son did here to Adonijah, ver. 43. *Verily*, the best tidings I have to bring you is, that *Solomon is made king*, so that your pretensions are all quashed.

He relates to them very particularly, 1. With what great solemnity *Solomon was made king*, ver. 44, 45. and that he was now *sitting on the throne of the kingdom*, ver. 46. Adonijah thought to have stepped into the throne before him, but Solomon was too quick for him. 2. With what general satisfaction Solomon was made king, so that which was done was not likely to be undone again. (1.) The people were pleased, you have their joyful acclamations, ver. 45. (2.) The courtiers are pleased ; *The king's servants* attended him with an address of congratulation upon this occasion, ver. 47. We have here the heads of their address, they *blessed king David*, applauded his prudent care for the publick welfare, acknowledged their happiness under his government, and prayed hear-

tily for his recovery. They also prayed for Solomon, that God would make his name better than his father's, which it might well be when he had his father's foundation to build upon ; a child on a giant's shoulders is taller than the giant himself. (3.) The king himself is pleased, he *bowed himself upon the bed*, not only to signify his acceptance of his servants address, but to offer up his own address to God, ver. 48. *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel*, who, as Israel's God, for Israel's good, has brought this matter to such a happy issue, *mine eyes even seeing it*. Note, It is a great satisfaction to good men, when they are going out of the world, to see the affairs of their families in a good posture, their children rising up in their stead to serve God and their generation, and especially to see peace upon Israel, and the establishment of it.

2. The effectual crush which this gave to Adonijah's attempt, it spoiled their sport, dispersed their company, and obliged every man to shift for his own safety. *The triumphing of the wicked is short*. It was a castle in the air that they were building, which having no foundation would soon come down about their ears ; they were afraid of being taken in the manner, (as we say) while they were together hatching their treason, and therefore each one made the best of his way.

3. The terror Adonijah himself was in, and the course he took to secure himself ; he was not so much elevated, ver. 42. but he is as much sunk, ver. 50. he had despised Solomon, as not worthy to be his guest, ver. 10. but now he dreads him as his judge ; he *feared because of Solomon*. Thus they who oppose Christ and his kingdom will shortly be made to tremble before him, and call in vain to rocks and mountains to shelter them from his wrath. He *took hold on the horns of the altar*, which was always looked upon as a sanctuary, or place of refuge, Exod. xxi. 14. intimating hereby, that he durst not stand a trial, but threw himself upon the mercy of his prince, in suing for which he relied upon no other plea, but only the mercy of God, which was manifested in the institution and acceptance of the sacrifices that were offered on that altar, and the remission of sin thereupon. Perhaps, Adonijah had formerly slighted the service of the altar, yet now he courts the protection of it. Many, that in the day of their security, neglect the great salvation, under the arrests of the terrors of the Lord, would gladly be beholden to Christ and his merit, and, when it is too late, will *catch hold of the horns of that altar*.

4. His humble address to Solomon for mercy. By those who brought Solomon tidings where he was, he sent a request for his life, ver. 51. *Let king Solomon swear to me that he will not slay his servant*. He owns Solomon for his prince, and himself his servant, dares not justify himself, but *makes supplication to his judge*. It was a great change with him ; he that in the morning was grasping at a crown, is before night begging for his life. Then Adonijah reigns, now Adonijah trembles, and cannot think himself safe, unless Solomon promise with an oath not to put him to death.

5. The orders Solomon gave concerning him. He discharged him upon his good behaviour, ver. 52, 53. he considers he is his brother, it was the first offence, perhaps, being so soon made sensible of his error, and then not persisting in his rebellion, he might prove, not only a peaceable, but a serviceable subject, and therefore, if he will approve himself well for the future, what is past shall be pardoned ; but if he be found disaffected, turbulent and aspiring, this offence shall be remembered against him, he shall be called up upon his former conviction, (as our law speaks) and execution awarded against him. Thus the son of David receives those to mercy that have been rebellious, if they will return to their allegiance, and be faithful to their sovereign, their former crimes shall not be mentioned against them ; but if still they continue in the interests of the world and the flesh, that will be their ruin. Adonijah is sent for, and told upon what terms he stands, which he signifies his grateful submission to, and then is bid to go to his house, and live retired there : Solomon not only gave him his life, but his estate, thus *establishing his throne by mercy*.

C H A P. II.

In this chapter we have David setting, and Solomon at the same time rising. 1. *The conclusion of David's reign with his life*. (1.) *The charge he gives to Solomon upon his death-bed, in general to serve God*, ver. 1,—4. in particular concerning Joab, Barzillai, and Shimei, ver. 5,—9. (2.) *His death and burial, and the years of his reign*, ver. 10, 11. 2. *The beginning of Solomon's reign*, ver. 12. *Though he was to be a prince of peace, he began his reign with some remarkable acts of justice*, (1.) *Upon Adonijah, whom he put to death for his aspiring pretensions*, ver. 13,—25. (2.) *Upon Abiathar, whom he deposed from the high priesthood for siding with Adonijah*, ver. 26, 27. (3.) *Upon Joab, whom he put to death for his late treason, and former murders*, ver. 28,—35. (4.) *Upon Shimei, whom, for cursing David, he confined to Jerusalem*, ver. 36,—38. *And three years after, for transgressing the rules, put him to death*, ver. 39,—46.

1. **N**OW the days of David drew nigh, that he should die ; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, 2. I go the way of all the earth : be thou strong

strong therefore, and shew thy self a man. 3. And keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways; to keep his statutes and his commandments, and his judgments and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thy self: 4. That the LORD may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth, with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said he) a man on the throne of Israel. 5. Moreover, thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on his feet. 6. Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace. 7. But shew kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at thy table: for so they came to me when I fled because of Absalom thy brother. 8. And behold, thou hast with thee Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite of Bahurim, which cursed me with a grievous curse, in the day when I went to Mahanaim: but he came down to meet me at Jordan, and I swore to him by the LORD, saying, I will not put thee to death with the sword. 9. Now therefore hold him not guiltless: for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him; but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood. 10. So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David. 11. And the days that David reigned over Israel, were forty years: seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem.

David, that great and good man, is here a dying man, ver. 1. and a dead man, ver. 10. It is well there is another life after this, for death stains all the glory of this, and lays it in the dust. We have here,

1. The charge and instructions which David, when he was dying, gave to Solomon his son, and declared successor. He feels himself declining, and is not backward to own it, nor afraid to hear or speak of dying; *I go the way of all the earth*, ver. 2. Hebrew, *I am walking in it*. Note, 1. Death is a way; not only a period of this life, but a passage to a better. 2. It is the way of all the earth, of all mankind who dwell on earth, and are themselves earth, and therefore must return to their earth. Even the sons and heirs of heaven must go the way of all the earth, they must needs die; but they walk with pleasure in this way, through the valley of the shadow of death, Psalm xxiii. 4. Prophets, and even kings, must go this way to brighter light and honour than prophecy or sovereignty. David is going this way, and therefore gives Solomon directions what to do.

(1.) He chargeth him in general to keep God's commandments, and to make conscience of his duty, ver. 2, 3, 4. He prescribes to him, 1. A good rule to act by; the divine will; govern thy self by that. David's charge to him is, to keep the charge of the Lord his God. The authority of a dying father is much, but nothing to that of a living God. There are great trusts which we are charged with by the Lord our God, let us keep them carefully, as those that must give account; and excellent statutes, which we must be ruled by, let us also keep them. The written word is our rule; Solomon must himself do as was written in the law of Moses. 2. A good spirit to act with. Be strong, and shew thy self a man, though in years but a child. Those that would keep the charge of the Lord their God must put on resolution. 3. Good reasons for all this. This would effectually conduce, (1.) To the prosperity of his kingdom; it is the way to prosper in all thou doest, and to succeed with honour and satisfaction in every undertaking. (2.) To the perpetuity of it. That the Lord may continue, and so confirm, his word which he spake concerning me. Those that rightly value the treasure of the promise, that sacred depositum, cannot but be solicitous to preserve the entail of it, and very desirous that those who come after them may do nothing to cut it off. Let each in their own age successively keep God's charge, and then God will be sure to continue his word. We never let fall the promise, till we let fall the precept. God had promised David that the Messiah should come from his loins, and that promise was absolute: but the promise, that there should not fail him a man on the throne of Israel, was conditional; if his seed behave themselves as they should. If Solomon, in his day, fulfil the condition, he doth his part towards the perpetuating of the promise. The condition is, that he walk before God, in all his institutions, in sincerity, with zeal

and resolution; and in order hereunto, that he take heed to his way. In order to our constancy in religion, nothing more necessary than caution and circumspection.

(2.) He gives him directions concerning some particular persons, what to do with them, that he might make up his deficiencies in justice to some, and kindness to others.

1. Concerning Joab, ver. 5. David was now conscious to himself that he had not done well to spare him, when he had made himself once and again obnoxious to the law, by the murder of Abner first, and afterwards of Amasa, both of them great men, captains of the hosts of Israel: he slew them treacherously, shed the blood of war in peace; and injuriously to David; thou knowest what he did to me therein. The murder of a subject is a wrong to the prince, it is a loss to him, and is against the peace of our sovereign lord the king. These murders were particularly against David, reflecting upon his reputation, he being at that time in treaty with them, and hazarded his interest, which they were very capable of serving. Magistrates are the avengers of the blood of those they have the charge of. It aggravated Joab's crime, that he was neither ashamed of the sin, nor afraid of the punishment, but daringly wore the girdle and shoes that were stained with innocent blood, in defiance of the justice both of God and the king. David refers him to Solomon's wisdom, ver. 6. with an intimation that he left him to his justice. Say not, he has an hoary head, it is pity it should be cut off, for it will shortly fall of it self; no, let it not go down to the grave in peace. Though he has been long reprieved, he shall be reckoned with at last, time doth not wear out the guilt of any sin, particularly not of murder.

2. Concerning Barzillai's family, whom he orders him to be kind to for Barzillai's sake, who, we may suppose, by this time was dead, ver. 7. When David upon his death-bed was remembering the injuries that had been done, he could not forget the kindnesses that had been shewn, but leaves it as a charge upon his son to return them. Note, The kindnesses we have received from our friends must not be buried, either in their graves or ours, but our children must return them to theirs. Hence, perhaps, Solomon fetched that rule, Prov. xxvii. 10. Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not. Paul prays for the house of Onesiphorus, who had oft refreshed him.

3. Concerning Shimei, ver. 8, 9. 1. His crime is remembered; He cursed me with a grievous curse, and the more grievous, because he insulted him when he was in misery, and poured vinegar into his wounds. The Jews say, that one thing which made this a grievous curse, was, that beside all that is mentioned 2 Sam. xvi. Shimei upbraided him with his descent from Ruth the Moabitess. 2. His pardon is not forgotten. David owns he had sworn to him that he would not himself put him to death, because he seasonably submitted, and cried *peccavi*; and he was not willing, especially at that juncture, to use the sword of publick justice for the avenging of wrongs done to himself. But, 3. His case, as it now stands, is left with Solomon, as one that knew what was fit to be done, and would do as he found occasion. David intimates to him, that his pardon was not designed to be perpetual, but only a reprieve for David's life; hold him not guiltless; Do not think him any true friend to thee or thy government, nor fit to be trusted: he has no less malice than he had then, though he has more wit to conceal it. He is still a debtor to the publick justice for what he did then; and though I promised him that I would not put him to death, I never promised that my successor should not. His turbulent spirit will soon give thee an occasion, which thou shouldst not fail to take, for the bringing of his hoary head to the grave with blood. This proceeded not from personal revenge, but a prudent zeal for the honour of the government, and the covenant God had made with his family, the contempt of which ought not to go unpunished. Even a hoary head, if a guilty and forfeited head, ought not to be any man's protection from justice. The sinner, being a hundred years old, shall be accursed, Isa. lxv. 20.

2. David's death and burial, ver. 10. He was buried in the city of David, not in the burying-place of his father, as Saul was, but in his own city, which he was the founder of. There were set the thrones, and there the tombs of the house of David. — Now David, after he had served his own generation, by the will of God, fell asleep, and was laid to his fathers, and saw corruption, Acts xiii. 36. and see Acts ii. 39. His epitaph may be taken from 2 Sam. xxiii. 1. Here lies David the son of Jesse, the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel; adding his own words, Psalm xvi. 9. My flesh also shall rest in hope. Josephus saith, that besides the usual magnificence with which his son Solomon buried him, he put into his sepulchre a vast deal of money; and that 1300 years after (so he reckons) it was opened by Hircanus the high priest, in the time of Antiochus, and 3000 talents taken out for the publick service. The years of his reign are here computed, ver. 11. to be forty years; the odd six months, which he reigned above seven years in Hebron, are not reckoned, but the even sum only.

12. ¶ Then sat Solomon upon the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was established greatly.
13. ¶ And Adonijah the son of Haggith came to Bath-

Bath-sheba the mother of Solomon, and she said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably. 14. He said moreover, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And she said, Say on. 15. And he said, Thou knowest that the kingdom was mine, and *that* all Israel set their faces on me, that I should reign: howbeit, the kingdom is turned about, and is become my brothers: for it was his from the LORD. 16. And now I ask one petition of thee, deny me not. And she said unto him, Say on. 17. And he said, Speak, I pray thee, unto Solomon the king (for he will not say thee nay) that he give me Abishag the Shunammite to wife. 18. And Bath-sheba said, Well, I will speak for thee unto the king. 19. ¶ Bath-sheba therefore went unto king Solomon, to speak unto him for Adonijah: and the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother; and she sat on his right hand. 20. Then she said, I desire one small petition of thee, *I pray thee* say me not nay. And the king said unto her, Ask on, my mother, for I will not say thee nay. 21. And she said, Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah thy brother to wife. 22. And king Solomon answered and said unto his mother, And why dost thou ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? ask for him the kingdom also; (for he *is* mine elder brother) even for him, and for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruiah. 23. Then king Solomon swore by the LORD, saying, God do so to me, and more also, if Adonijah have not spoken this word against his own life. 24. Now therefore, *as* the LORD liveth, which hath established me, and set me on the throne of David my father, and who hath made me an house, as he promised, Adonijah shall be put to death this day. 25. And king Solomon sent by the hand of Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and he fell upon him that he died.

Here is, 1. Solomon's accession to the throne, *ver.* 12. He came to it much more easily and peaceably than David did, and much sooner saw his government established. It is happy for a kingdom when the end of one good reign is the beginning of another, as it was here.

2. His just and necessary removal of Adonijah his rival, in order to the establishment of his throne. Adonijah had made some bold pretensions to the crown, but was soon obliged to let them fall, and throw himself upon Solomon's mercy, who dismissed him upon his good behaviour, and had he been easy, he might have been safe. But here we have him betraying himself into the hands of Solomon's justice, and falling by it; the righteous God leaving him to himself, that he might be punished for his former treason, and that Solomon's throne might be established. Many thus ruin themselves because they know not when they are well, nor well done to; and sinners, by presuming on God's patience, treasure up wrath to themselves. Now observe,

1. Adonijah's treasonable project, which was to marry Abishag, David's concubine; not because he was in love with her, but because by her he hoped to renew his claim to the crown, which might stand him in stead, or because it was then looked upon as a branch of the government, to have *the wives of the predecessor*, 2 Sam. xii. 8. Absalom thought his pretensions much supported by lying with his father's concubines. Adonijah flatters himself, that if he may succeed him in his bed, especially with the best of his wives, he may by that means step up to succeed him in his throne. Restless and turbulent spirits have great reaches. It was but a small game to play at, as it should seem, yet he hopes to make it an after-game for the kingdom, and now gain that by a wife, which he could not gain by force.

2. The means he used to compass this. He durst not make suit to Abishag immediately, he knew she was at Solomon's dispose, and he would justly resent it if his consent were not first obtained, as even Ish-bosheth did in a like case, 2 Sam. iii. 7. nor durst he apply himself immediately to Solomon, knowing that he lay under his displeasure, but he engaged Bath-sheba to be his friend in this matter, who would be forward to believe it a matter of love, and not apt to suspect it a matter of policy. Bath-sheba was surprized to see Adonijah in her apartment, and asked him if he did not come with a design to do her a mischief, because she had been instrumental to crush his late attempt. No, saith he, I come *peaceably*, *ver.* 13. and to beg a favour, *ver.* 14. that she would use the great interest she had in her son, to gain his consent that he might marry Abishag, *ver.* 16, 17. and if he may but obtain this, he will thankfully accept it, 1. As a compensation for his loss of the kingdom. He insinuates, *ver.* 15. *Thou knowest the kingdom was mine*, as my father's eldest son, living at the time of his death, and

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all Israel set their faces on me. That was false, they were but a few that he had on his side; yet thus he would represent himself as an object of compassion, that had been deprived of a crown, and therefore might well be gratified in a wife: if he may not inherit his father's throne, yet let him have something valuable that was his father's to keep for his sake, and let it be Abishag. 2. As for his reward for his acquiescence in that loss. He owns Solomon's right to the kingdom, *it was his from the Lord*, and I was a fool for offering to contest it, and now it is turned about to him, I am satisfied. Thus he pretends to be well pleased with Solomon's accession to the throne, when he is doing all he can to give him disturbance. *His words were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart.*

3. Bath-sheba's address to Solomon on his behalf. She promised to speak to the king for him, *ver.* 18. and did so, *ver.* 19. Solomon received her with all the respect that was owing to a mother; though he himself was a king; he *rose up to her, bowed himself to her, set her to sit on his right hand*, according to the law of the fifth commandment. Children, not only when grown up, but when grown great, must give honour to their parents, and carry themselves dutifully and respectfully towards them. *Despise not thy mother when she is old.* — As a farther instance of the deference he paid to his mother's wisdom and authority, when he understood she had a petition to present to him, he promised not to say her nay. A promise which both he and she understood with this necessary limitation, provided it be just and reasonable, and fit to be granted; but if it were otherwise, he doubted not but to convince her that it was so, and that then she would withdraw it. She tells him her errand at last, *ver.* 21. *Let Abishag be given to Adonijah thy brother.* It was strange she did not suspect the treason, but more strange she did not abhor the incest that was in the proposal: but either she did not take Abishag to be David's wife, because the marriage was not consummated, or she thought it might be dispensed with to gratify Adonijah, in consideration of his tame submission to Solomon. This was her weakness and folly; it was well she was not regent. Note, They that have the ear of princes and great men, as it is their wisdom not to be too prodigal of their interest, so it is their duty never to use it for the assistance of sin, or the furtherance of any wicked design. Let not princes be asked that which they ought not to grant. It ill becomes a good man to make an ill motion, or appear in a bad cause.

4. Solomon's just and judicious rejection of the request. Though his mother herself was the advocate, and called it a small petition, and, perhaps, it was the first she troubled him with since he was king, yet he denied it, without violation of the general promise he had made, *ver.* 20. If Herod had not had a mind to cut off John Baptist's head, he would not have thought himself obliged to do it by a general promise, like this, made to Herodias. The best friend we have in the world must not have such an interest in us as to bring us to do an ill thing, either unjust or unwise. 1. Solomon convinceth his mother of the unreasonableness of the request, and shews her the tendency of it, which before she was not aware of. His repartee is somewhat sharp, *Ask for him the kingdom also*, *ver.* 22. To ask that he may succeed the king in his bed, is, in effect, to ask that he may succeed him in his throne, for that is it he aims at. Probably, he had information, or cause for a strong suspicion, that Adonijah was plotting with Joab and Abiathar to give him disturbance, which warranted him to put this construction upon Adonijah's request. 2. He convicts and condemns Adonijah for his pretensions, and both with an oath. He convicts him out of his own mouth, *ver.* 23. His own tongue shall fall upon him, and a heavier load a man need not fall under: Bath-sheba may be imposed upon, but Solomon cannot; he plainly sees what he aims at, and concludes, he has *spoken this word against his own life*; he is snared in the words of his own lips; now he shews what he would be at. He condemns him to die immediately; *He shall be put to death this day*, *ver.* 24. God had interposed himself with an oath, that he would establish David's throne, *Psal.* lxxxix. 35. and therefore Solomon pledgeth the same assurances to secure that establishment, by cutting off the enemies of it. As God liveth that establisheth the government, Adonijah shall die that would unsettle it. Thus the ruin of the enemies of Christ's kingdom is as sure as the stability of his kingdom, and both as sure as the being and life of God, the founder of it. The warrant is immediately signed for his execution, and no less a man than Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, general of the army, is ordered to be the executioner, *ver.* 25. It is strange Adonijah may not be heard to speak for himself: but Solomon's wisdom did not see it needful to examine the matter any farther; it was plain enough Adonijah aimed at the crown, and Solomon cannot be safe while he lives. Ambitious turbulent spirits commonly prepare for themselves the instruments of death. Many a head has been lost by catching at a crown.

26. ¶ And unto Abiathar the priest said the king, Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields, for thou art worthy of death: but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the LORD

God before David my father, and because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted. 27. So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the LORD, that he might fulfil the word of the LORD, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh. 28. ¶ Then tidings came to Joab, (for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom) and Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. 29. And it was told king Solomon that Joab was fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD, and behold, *he is* by the altar: then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go fall upon him. 30. And Benaiah came to the tabernacle of the LORD, and said unto him, Thus saith the king, Come forth. And he said, Nay, but I will die here. And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me. 31. And the king said unto him, Do as he hath said, and fall upon him, and bury him; that thou mayest take away the innocent blood which Joab shed, from me, and from the house of my father. 32. And the LORD shall return his blood upon his own head, who fell upon two men more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword, my father David not knowing *thereof, to wit*, Abner the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah. 33. Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab, and upon the head of his seed for ever: but upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and upon his throne, shall there be peace for ever from the LORD. 34. So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and fell upon him, and slew him; and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness.

Abiathar and Joab were both aiding and abetting in Adonijah's rebellious attempt, and, it is probable, were at the bottom of this new motion made by Adonijah for Abishag, and, it should seem, Solomon knew it, *ver.* 22. This was in both an intolerable affront, both to God, and to the government; and the worse, because of their high station, and the great influence their examples might have upon many. They therefore come next to be reckoned with: they are both equally guilty of the treason, but in the judgment past upon them, a difference is made, and with good reason.

1. Abiathar, in consideration of his old services, is only degraded, *ver.* 26, 27. (1.) Solomon convicts him, and by his great wisdom finds him guilty. *Thou art worthy of death*, for joining with Adonijah, when thou knewest on whose head God intended to set the crown. (2.) He calls to mind the respects he had formerly shewed to David his father, and that he had both ministered to him in holy things, *had born before him the ark of the Lord*, and also had tenderly sympathized with him in his afflictions, and been afflicted in them all, particularly when he was in exile and distress, both by Saul's persecution, and Absalom's rebellion. Note, Those that shew kindness to God's people, shall have it remembered to their advantage one time or other. (3.) For this reason he spares Abiathar's life, but deposes him from his offices, and confines him to his country seat at Anathoth, forbids him the court, the city, the tabernacle, the altar, and all intermeddling in publick business, with an intimation likewise, that he was upon his good behaviour; and that though he did not put him to death at this time, he might another time, if he did not carry himself well. But for the present he was only thrust out from being priest, as rendered unworthy that high station, by the opposition he had given to that which he knew to be the will of God. Saul, for a supposed crime, had barbarously slain Abiathar's father, and eighty-five priests, their families and city; Solomon spares Abiathar himself, though guilty of a real crime: thus was Saul's government ruined, and Solomon's established. As men are to God's ministers, they will find him to them. (4.) The depriving of Abiathar was the fulfilling of the threatening against the house of Eli, *1 Sam.* ii. 30. for he was the last high priest of that family. It was now above eighty years since the ruin was threatened, but God's judgments, though not executed speedily, will be executed surely.

2. Joab, in consideration of his old sins, is put to death.

(1.) His guilty conscience sent him to the horns of the altar. He heard that Adonijah was executed, and Abiathar deposed, and therefore fearing his turn would be next, he flies for refuge to the altar. Many that in the day of their security care not for the service of the altar, in the day of their distress will be glad of the protection of it. Some think Joab designed thereby to devote himself for the future to a constant attendance upon the altar, hoping thereby to obtain his pardon: as some that have lived a dissolute

life all their days, have thought to atone for it, by retiring into a monastery when they are old, leaving the world when it has left them, and no thanks to them.

(2.) Solomon orders him to be put to death there for the murder of Abner and Amasa, for these are the crimes upon which he thought fit to ground the sentence, rather than upon his treasonable adherence to Adonijah. Joab was indeed worthy of death for turning after Adonijah, in contempt of Solomon, and his designation to the throne, *though he had not turned after Absalom*, *ver.* 28. Former fidelity will not serve to excuse for any after treachery; yet, besides that Joab had merited well of the house of David, to which, and to his country, he had done a great deal of good service in his day, in consideration of which, it is probable, Solomon would have pardoned him his offence against him, (for clemency gives great reputation and establishment to an infant government) and would have only displaced him, as he did Abiathar; but he must die for the murder he had formerly been guilty of, which his father had charged him to call him to an account for. The debt he owed to the innocent blood that was shed, by answering its cries with the blood of him that shed it, he could not pay himself, but left it to his son to pay it, who, having power wherewithal, failed not to do it. On this he grounds the sentence, aggravating the crime, *ver.* 32: that he *fell upon two men more righteous and better than he*, that had done him no wrong, nor meant him any, and, had they lived, might, probably, have done David better service: if the blood shed be not only innocent, but excellent, the life more valuable than common lives, the crime is the more heinous: that David knew not of it, and yet the case was such, that he would be suspected as privy to it; so that Joab endangered his prince's reputation in taking away the life of his rivals, which was a further aggravation.

For these crimes, 1. He must die, and die by the sword of publick justice: *By man must his blood be shed*, and it lies upon his own head, *ver.* 32. as theirs doth whom he had murdered, *ver.* 33. Wo to the head that lies under the guilt of blood; vengeance for murder was long in coming upon Joab, but when it did come it remained the longer, being here entailed *upon the head of his seed for ever*, *ver.* 33. who, instead of deriving honour, as otherwise they might have done, from his heroick actions, derived guilt and shame, and a curse, from his villainous actions, and fared the worse for it in this world. The seed of such evil doers shall never be renowned. 2. He must die at the altar rather than escape. Joab resolved not to stir from the altar, *ver.* 30. hoping thereby either to secure himself, or else to render Solomon odious to the people, as a profaner of the holy place, if he should put him to death there. Benaiah made a scruple of either killing him there, or dragging him thence, but Solomon knew the law, that the altar of God should give no protection to wilful murderers, *Exod.* xxi. 14. *Thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die*, may die a sacrifice. In case of such sins, as the blood of beasts would atone for, the altar was a refuge, but not in Joab's case; he therefore orders him to be executed there, if he would not be got thence, to shew that he feared not the censure of the people in doing his duty, but would rectify their mistake, and let them know that the administration of justice is better than sacrifice, and that the holiness of any place should never countenance the wickedness of any person. They who by a lively faith take hold on Christ and his righteousness, with a resolution, if they perish to perish there, shall find in him a more powerful protection than Joab found at the horns of the altar. Benaiah slew him, *ver.* 34. with the solemnity, no doubt, of a publick execution: the law being thus satisfied, he was *buried in his own house in the wilderness*, privately, like a criminal, not pompously, like a soldier; yet no indignity is done to his dead body; it is not for man to lay the iniquity upon the bones, whatever God doth.

Lastly, Solomon pleaseth himself with this act of justice, not as it gratified any personal revenge, but as it was the fulfilling of his father's orders, and a real kindness to himself and his own government. 1. Guilt was hereby removed, *ver.* 31. by returning the innocent blood that had been shed upon the head of him that shed it, it was taken away from him, and from the house of his father, which implies that the blood which is not required from the murderer, will be required from the magistrate, at least there is danger lest it should. They that would have their houses safe and built up, must put away iniquity far from them. 2. Peace was hereby secured, *ver.* 33. upon David, he doth not mean his person, but, as he explains himself in the next words, upon *his seed, his house, and his throne*, shall there be *peace for ever from the Lord*; thus he expresseth his desire that it may be so, and his hope that it shall be so. Now justice is done, and the cry of blood is satisfied, the government will prosper. Thus *righteousness and peace kiss each other*. Now such a turbulent man as Joab is removed, there shall be peace. *Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness*, *Prov.* xxv. 5. Solomon, in this blessing of peace upon his house and throne, piously looks upward to God as the author of it, and forward to eternity as the perfection of it, it shall be peace from the Lord, and peace for ever from the Lord. The Lord of peace himself give us that peace which is everlasting.

35. ¶ And the king put Benaiah the son of Jehoiada in his room over the host; and Zadok the priest did the king put in the room of Abiathar. 36. ¶ And the king sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Build thee an house in Jerusalem and dwell there, and go not forth thence any whither. 37. For it shall be *that* on the day thou goest out, and passest over the brook Kidron, thou shalt know for certain, that thou shalt surely die: thy blood shall be upon thine own head. 38. And Shimei said unto the king, The saying is good: and as my lord the king hath said, so will thy servant do. And Shimei dwelt in Jerusalem many days. 39. And it came to pass after the end of three years, that two of the servants of Shimei ran away unto Achish son of Maachah king of Gath: and they told Shimei, saying, Behold, thy servants *be* in Gath. 40. And Shimei arose and saddled his ass, and went to Gath to Achish to seek his servants: and Shimei went and brought his servants from Gath. 41. And it was told Solomon that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath, and was come again. 42. And the king sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Did I not make thee to swear by the LORD, and protested unto thee, saying, Know for a certain, *that* on the day thou goest out, and walkest abroad any whither, that thou shalt surely die? and thou saidst unto me, The word *that* I have heard is good. 43. Why then hast thou not kept the oath of the LORD, and the commandment that I have charged thee with? 44. The king said moreover to Shimei, Thou knowest all the wickedness which thine heart is privy to, that thou didst to David my father: therefore the LORD shall return thy wickedness upon thine own head; 45. And king Solomon *shall be blessed*, and the throne of David shall be established before the LORD for ever. 46. So the king commanded Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, which went out and fell upon him, that he died: and the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.

Here is, 1. The preferment of Benaiah and Zadok, two faithful friends to Solomon and his government, *ver. 35.* Joab being put to death, Benaiah was advanced to be general of the forces in his room, and Abiathar being deposed, Zadok was made high-priest in his room, and therein was fulfilled that word of God, when he threatened to cut off the house of Eli, *1 Sam. ii. 35. I will raise me up a faithful priest, and will build him a sure house.* Though sacred offices may be disgraced, they shall not be destroyed by the male-administrations of those that are entrusted with them, nor shall God's work ever stand still for want of hands to carry it on; he that was a king so immediately of God's making, no marvel he was empowered to make who he thought fit high-priest, and he did it in equity, for the ancient right was in Zadok, he being of the family of Eleazar, whereas Eli and his house were of Ithamar.

2. The course that was taken with Shimei. He is sent for up by a messenger from his house at Bahurim, expecting, perhaps, no better than Adonijah's doom, being conscious of his enmity to the house of David; but Solomon knows how to make a difference of crimes and criminals, David had promised Shimei his life for his time, Solomon is not bound by that promise, and yet will not go directly contrary to it.

1. He confined him to Jerusalem, and forbade him, upon any pretence whatsoever, to go out of the city, any further than the brook Kidron, *ver. 36, 37.* he would not suffer him to continue at his country seat, lest he should make mischief among his neighbours, but took him to Jerusalem, where he kept him prisoner at large; this might make Shimei's confinement easy to himself, for Jerusalem was beautiful for situation, *the joy of the whole earth*, the royal city, the holy city, he had no reason to complain of being shut up in such a paradise; it would also make it the more safe for Solomon, for there he would have him under his eye, and be able to watch his motions; and he plainly tells him, if he ever go out of the rules, he shall certainly die for it; this was a fair trial of his obedience, and a test of his loyalty, as he had no reason to complain of; he has his life upon easy terms, he shall live, if he will, but be content to live at Jerusalem.

2. Shimei submits to the confinement, and thankfully takes his life upon those terms; he enters into recognizance, *ver. 38.* under the penalty of death, not to stir out of Jerusalem, and owns the saying is good: Even they that perish, cannot but own the conditions of pardon and life unexceptionable, so that their blood, like Shimei's, must rest upon their own heads. Shimei promised, with an oath, to keep within his bounds, *ver. 42.*

3. Shimei forfeits his recognizance, which was the thing Solomon expected, and God was righteous in suffering him to do it; that he might now suffer for his old sins. Two of his servants, (it seems, though he was a prisoner, he lived like himself, well attended) out-run him to the land of the Philistines, *ver. 39.* thither he pursued them, and thence brought them back to Jerusalem, *ver. 40.* For the keeping of it private he *saddled his ass* himself, probably went in the night, and came home, he thought, undiscovered. "Seeking his servants, (faith bishop Hall) he lost himself; these earthly things either are, or should be our servants; how commonly do we see men run out of the bounds, set by God's law; to hunt after them till their souls incur a fearful judgment."

4. Solomon taxes the forfeiture. Information is given him, that Shimei had transgressed, *ver. 41:* The king sends for him, and 1. Chargeth him with the present crime, *ver. 42, 43:* that he had put a great contempt upon the authority and wrath, both of God and the king, that he had broken *the oath of the Lord*, and disobeyed the commandment of his prince, and by this, it appeared what manner of spirit he was of, that he would not be held by the bonds of gratitude or conscience; had he represented to Solomon the urgency of the occasion, and begged leave to go; perhaps, Solomon might have given him leave, but to presume, either upon his ignorance or his connivance, was to affront him in the highest degree. 2. He condemns him for his former crime, cursing David, and throwing stones at him in the day of his affliction: *The wickedness which thy heart is privy to*, *ver. 44:* There was no need to examine witnesses for the proof of the fact, his own conscience was instead of a thousand witnesses; that wickedness which mens *own hearts* alone are privy to is enough, is duly considered, to fill them with confusion, in expectation of its return upon *their own heads*; for if the heart be privy to it, God is greater than the heart. Others knew of Shimei's cursing David, but Shimei himself knew of the wicked principles of hatred and malice against David, which he went upon in cursing him, and that his submission was but feigned and forced. 3. He blessed himself and his own government, *ver. 45. King Solomon shall be blessed*, notwithstanding Shimei's impotent curses, which, perhaps, in fury and despair, he was now free of. *Let them curse, but bless thou. And the throne of David shall be established*, by taking away those that would undermine it. It is comfort, in reference to the enmity of the church's enemies, that how much soever they rage, it is a vain thing they imagine; Christ's throne is established, and they cannot shake it. 4. He gives orders for the execution of Shimei immediately, *ver. 46.* All judgment is committed to the Lord Jesus, and though he be king of peace, he will be found a king of righteousness, and this will shortly be his word of command, concerning all his enemies, that will not have him to reign over them, *Bring them forth, and slay them before me*; the tongues of them that blasphemed him will fall on their heads and cut their throats.

C H A P. III.

Solomon's reign looked bloody in the foregoing chapter, but the necessary acts of justice must not be called cruelty; in this chapter it appears with another face, we must not think the worse of God's mercy to his subjects for his judgments on rebels. We have here, (1.) Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, *ver. 1.* (2.) A general view of his religion, *ver. 2.---4.* 3. A particular account of his prayer to God for wisdom, and the answer to that prayer, *ver. 5.---15.* 4. A particular instance of his wisdom in deciding the controversy between the two harlots, *ver. 16.---28.* And very great he looks here, both at the altar, and on the bench, and therefore on the bench, because at the altar,

1. **A**ND Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall of Jerusalem round about. 2. Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days. 3. And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places. 4. And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt-offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar.

We are here told concerning Solomon,

1. Something that was unquestionably good, for which he is to be praised, and in which he is to be imitated. 1. He *loved the Lord*, *ver. 3.* Particular notice was taken of God's love to him, *2 Sam. xii. 24.* he had there his name from it, Jedediah, *beloved of*

of the Lord, and here we find he returned that love, as John, the beloved Disciple, was most full of love. Solomon, a wife man, a rich man, a great man, yet the brightest encomium of him, is that which is the character of all the saints, even the poorest, he *loved the Lord, he loved the worship of the Lord*, so the Chaldee; all that love God, love his worship, love to hear from him, and speak to him, and so to have communion with him. 2. He *walked in the statutes of David his father*, — i. e. in the statutes that David gave him, *chap. ii. 2, 3. 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, 10.* his dying father's charge was sacred, and as a law to him; or in God's statutes, which David his father walked in before him, he kept close to God's ordinances, carefully observed them, and diligently attended them; they that truly love God, will make conscience of walking in his statutes. 3. He was very free and generous in what he did for the honour of God; when he offered sacrifice, he offered like a king, in some proportion to his great wealth, a *thousand burnt-offerings*, ver. 4. where God sows plentifully he expects to reap accordingly, and those that truly love God, and his worship, will not grudge at the expences of their religion. We may be tempted to say, *To what purpose is this waste?* Might not these cattle have been given to the poor? But we must never think that wasted which is laid out in the service of God. It seems strange, how so many beasts should be burnt upon one altar in one feast, though it continued seven days, but the fire on the altar is supposed to be more quick and devouring than common fire, for it represented that fierce and mighty wrath of God, which fell upon the sacrifices, that the offerers might escape; *Our God is a consuming fire.* Bishop Patrick quotes it as a tradition of the Jews, that the smoke of the sacrifices ascended in a straight pillar, and was not scattered, otherwise it would have choked those that attended, when so many sacrifices were offered as were here.

2. Here is something, concerning which it may be doubted, whether it were good or no.

(1.) His marrying Pharaoh's daughter, *ver. 1.* We will suppose she was profelyted, else it had not been lawful, yet, if so, sure it was not adviseable; he that *loved the Lord*, should, for his sake, have pitched his love upon one of the Lord's people; unequal matches of the sons of God with the daughters of men, have oft been of pernicious consequence, yet, some think he did this with the advice of his friends, that she was a sincere convert, for the gods of the Egyptians are not reckoned among the strange gods, which his strange wives drew him in to the worship of, *chap. xi. 5, 6.* and that the book of Canticles, and 45th psalm were penned on this occasion, by which these nuptials were made typical of the mystical espousals of the church to Christ, especially the gentile church.

(2.) His worshipping in the high-places, and thereby tempting the people to do so too, *ver. 2; 3.* Abraham built his altars on mountains, *Gen. xii. 8.---xxii. 2.* and worshipped in a grove, *Gen. xxi. 33.* thence the custom was derived, and was well enough till the divine law obliged them to one place, *Deut. xii. 5, 6.* David stuck to the ark, and did not care for the high places, but Solomon, though in other things, he *walked in the statutes of his father*, in this came short of him, he shewed thereby a great zeal for sacrificing, but to obey had been better; this was an irregularity, though there was as yet no house built, there was a tent pitched to the name of the Lord, and the ark ought to have been the centre of their unity, it was so by divine institution, from it the high-places seperated, yet, while they worshipped God only, and in other things, according to the rule, he graciously overlooked their weakness, and accepted their services; and it is owned, that *Solomon loved the Lord*, though he *burnt incense in the high-places*, and let not men be more severe than God is.

5. ¶ In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee. 6. And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee, and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. 7. And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king in stead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. 8. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. 9. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart, to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? 10. And the speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing. 11. And God said unto him, Because thou

hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thy self long life, neither hast asked riches for thy self, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thy self understanding to discern judgment; 12. Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wife and understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. 13. And I have also given thee that thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee, all thy days. 14. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days. 15. And Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream: and he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and offered up burnt-offerings, and offered peace-offerings, and made a feast to all his servants.

We have here an account of a gracious visit which God made to Solomon, and the communion he had with God in it, which puts a greater honour upon Solomon than all the wealth and power of his kingdom did.

1. The circumstances of this visit, *ver. 5.* (1.) The place, it was in Gibeon, that was the great high place, and should have been the only one, because there the tabernacle and the brazen altar were, *2 Chron. i. 3.* there Solomon offered his great sacrifice, and there God owned him more than in any other of the high places; the nearer we come to the rule in our worship, the more reason we have to expect the tokens of God's presence; where God records his name, there he will meet us and bless us. (2.) The time, it was by night, the night after he had offered that generous sacrifice, *ver. 4.* the more we abound in God's work, the more comfort we may expect in him, if the day has been busy for him, the night shall be easy in him. Silence and retirement befriend our communion with God; his kindest visits are oft in the night, *Psal. xvii. 3.* (3.) The manner, it was in a dream, when he was asleep, his senses locked up, that God's access to his mind might be the more free and immediate; in this way God used to speak to the prophets, *Numb. xii. 6.* and to private persons for their own benefit, *Job xxxiii. 15, 16.* These divine dreams, no doubt, distinguished themselves from those, in which there are divers vanities, *Eccl. v. 7.*

2. The gracious offer God made him of the favour he should choose, whatever it were, *ver. 5.* He saw the glory of God shine about him, and heard a voice saying, *Ask what I shall give thee.* Not that God was indebted to him for his sacrifices, but thus he would testify his acceptance of them, and signify to him what great mercy he had in store for him, if he were not wanting to himself. Thus he would try his inclinations, and thus put an honour upon the prayer of faith. God, in like manner, condescends to us, and put us in the ready way to be happy, by assuring us, that we shall have what we will for the asking, *John xvi. 23. 1 John v. 15.* What would we more? *Ask and it shall be given you.*

3. The pious request Solomon hereupon made to God. He readily laid hold on this offer; why do we neglect the like offer made to us, like Ahaz, who said, *I will not ask?* *Isa. vii. 12.* Solomon prayed in his sleep, God's grace assisting him; yet it was a lively prayer. What we are most in care about, and which makes the greatest impression upon us when we are awake, commonly fills and affects us when we are asleep; and by our dreams, sometimes we may know what our hearts are upon, and which way our pulse beats. Plutarch makes virtuous dreams one evidence of increase in virtue. Yet this must be attributed to a higher source. Solomon's making such an intelligent choice as this, when he was asleep, and the powers of reason were least active, shewed, that it came purely from the grace of God, which wrought in him these gracious desires. If his *reins* thus *instruct him in the night season*, he must *bless the Lord who gave him counsel*, *Psal. xvi. 7.* Now in this prayer,

(1.) He acknowledges God's great goodness to his father David, *ver. 6.* He speaks honourably of his father's piety, that he had *walked before God in uprightness of heart*, drawing a veil over his faults. It is to be hoped, those will imitate their godly parents that praise them. But more honourably of God's goodness to his father, the mercy he had shewed to him while he lived, in giving him to be sincerely religious, and then recompensing his sincerity; and the great kindness he had kept for him, to be bestowed on his family when he was gone, in *giving him a son to sit on his throne.* Children should give God thanks for his mercies to their parents; for the sure mercies of David. God's favours are then doubly sweet, when we observe them transmitted to us, through the hands of those that have gone before us. The way to get the entail perpetuated, is to bless God that it has hitherto been preserved.

(2.) He

(2.) He owns his own insufficiency, for the discharge of that great trust to which he was called, *ver. 7, 8.* And here is a double plea to enforce his petition for wisdom. (1.) That his place required it. As he was successor to David; *Thou hast made me king instead of David*, who was a very wise, good man, Lord, give me wisdom, that I may keep up what he wrought; and carry on what he begun: And as he was ruler over Israel, Lord, give me wisdom to rule well, for they are a numerous people, that will not be managed without a great deal of care: And they are thy people, which thou hast chosen; and therefore to be ruled for thee; and the more wisely they are ruled, the more glory thou wilt have from them. (2.) That he wanted it; as one that had an humble sense of his own deficiency, he pleads, *Lord, I am but a little child*, so he calls himself, a child in understanding, though his father called him a wise man, *chap. ii. 9. I know not how to go out, or come in*; as I should, not to do so much as the common daily business of the government, much less what to do in a critical juncture. Note, Those who are employed in public stations, ought to be very sensible of the weight and importance of their work, and their own insufficiency for it; and then they are qualified for divine conduct and instruction. St. Paul's question, *Who is sufficient for these things?* is much like Solomon's here, *Who is able to judge this thy so great a people?* *ver. 9.* Absalom, that was a fool, wished himself a judge; Solomon, that was a wise man, trembles at the undertaking, and suspects his own fitness for it. The more knowing and considerate men are, the better acquainted they are with their own weakness, and the more jealous of themselves.

(3.) He begs of God to give him wisdom, *ver. 2. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart.* He calls himself God's servant, as pleased with that relation to God, *Psal. cxvi. 16.* and pleading it with him; I am devoted to thee, and employed for thee, give me that which is requisite to the services in which I am employed. Thus his good father prayed, and thus he pleaded, *Psal. cxix. 125. I am thy servant, give me understanding.* An understanding heart is God's gift, *Prov. ii. 6.* We must pray for it, *Jam. i. 5.* and pray for it with application to our particular vocation, and the various occasions we have for it; as Solomon, *Give me an understanding*, not to please my own curiosity with, or puzzle my neighbours, but to judge thy people. That is the best knowledge, which will be serviceable to us in doing our duty; and so that knowledge is, which enables us to discern between good and bad, right and wrong, sin and duty, truth and falsehood, so as not to be imposed upon by false colours, in judging either of others actions, or of our own.

4. The favourable answer God gave to his request. It was a pleasing prayer, *ver. 10. The speech pleased the Lord.* God is well pleased with his own work in his people; the desires of his own kindling, the prayers of his Spirit's inditing. By this choice Solomon made, it appeared, that he desired to be good more than great, and to serve God's honour more than to advance his own. Those are accepted of God, who prefer spiritual blessings before temporal, and are more solicitous to be found in the way of their duty, than in the way to preferment. But that was not all, it was a prevailing prayer, and prevailed for more than he asked. 1. God gave him wisdom, *ver. 12.* He fitted him for all that great work to which he had called him; gave him such a right understanding of the law which he was to judge by, and the cases he was to judge of, that never was his like, for a clear head, a solid judgment, and a piercing eye: Such an insight, and such a foresight, never was prince so blessed with.

2. He gives him riches and honour, over and above, into the bargain, *ver. 13.* and in these it is promised, he should as much exceed his predecessors, his successors, and all his neighbours, as in wisdom. These also are God's gift, and are promised to all that seek first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, as far as is good for them, *Matt. vi. 23.* Let young people learn to prefer grace before gold in all their choices, because godliness has the promise of the life that now is, but the life that now is has not the promise of godliness. How compleatly blessed was Solomon, that had both wisdom and wealth! He that has wealth and power without wisdom and grace, is in danger of doing hurt with it; he that has wisdom and grace without wealth and power, is not capable of doing so much good with it, as he that has both. Wisdom is good, is so much the better with an inheritance, *Ecclef. vii. 11.* But if we make sure wisdom and grace, those will either bring outward prosperity with them, or sweeten the want of it.—God promised Solomon riches and honour absolutely, but long life upon condition, *ver. 14. If thou wilt walk in my ways, as David did, then I will lengthen thy days*: he failed in the condition; and therefore though he had riches and honour, he did not live so long to enjoy them, as in a course of nature he might have done. Length of days is wisdom's right hand blessing, typical thereof of eternal life; but it is in her left hand that riches and honour are, *Prov. iii. 16.*

Let us see here, (1.) That the way to obtain spiritual blessings, is to be importunate for them; to wrestle with God in prayer for them, as Solomon did for wisdom, asking that only, as the one thing needful. (2.) That the way to temporal blessings, is

to be indifferent to them, and to refer our selves to God concerning them. Solomon has wisdom given him, because he did ask it, and wealth, because he did not.

5. The grateful return Solomon made for the visit God was pleased to make him, *ver. 15.* He awoke, we may suppose in a transport of joy; awoke, and *his sleep was sweet to him*, as the prophet speaks, *Jer. xxxi. 26.* being satisfied of God's favour, he was satisfied with it; and he began to think, *what he should render to the Lord.* He had made his prayer at the high place at Gibeon, and there God had graciously met him; but he comes to Jerusalem to give thanks *before the ark of the covenant*, as it were blaming himself that he had not prayed there, the ark being the token of God's presence, and wondering that God had met him any where else.—God's passing by our mistakes, should persuade us to amend them.

There he, (1.) offered a great sacrifice to God. We must give God praise for his gifts in the promise, though not yet fully performed. David used to praise God's word, as well as his works, *Psal. lvi. 10.* and particularly, *2 Sam. vii. 18.* and Solomon trod in his steps. (2.) He made a great feast, upon the sacrifice, that those about him might rejoice with him in the grace of God.

16. ¶ Then came there two women that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him. 17. And the one woman said, O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house, and I was delivered of a child, with her in the house. 18. And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we were together; there was no stranger with us in the house, save we two in the house. 19. And this woman's child died in the night; because she overlaid it. 20. And she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom. 21. And when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold, it was dead: but when I had considered it in the morning, behold, it was not my son which I did bear. 22. And the other woman said, Nay: but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son: and this said No; but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. Thus they spake before the king. 23. Then said the king, The one saith, This is my son that liveth, and thy son is the dead: and the other saith, Nay: but thy son is the dead, and my son is the living. 24. And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king. 25. And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other. 26. Then spake the woman whose the living child was, unto the king (for her bowels yerned upon her son) and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: but the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it. 27. Then the king answered, and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof. 28. And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged, and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.

An instance is here given of Solomon's wisdom, to shew that the grant lately made him, had a real effect upon him: And the proof is fetched, not from the mysteries of state, and the policies of the council board, though there, no doubt, he excelled, but from the trial and determination of a cause between party and party, which princes, though they devolve them upon their judges, must not think it below them to take cognizance of. Observe,

1. The case opened, not by lawyers, but by the parties themselves, though they were women, which made it the easier to such a piercing eye as Solomon had, to discern between right and wrong, by their own shewing. These two women were harlots, kept a publick house, and their children, some think, were born of fornication, because here is no mention of their husbands.—It is probable, the cause had been heard in the inferior courts, before it was brought before Solomon, and had been found specially, the judges being unable to determine it, that Solomon's wisdom in deciding it at last, might be the more taken notice of. These two women lived in a house together, were each of them delivered of a son within three days of one another, *ver. 17, 18.* They were so poor, that they had no servant or nurse-tender to be with them; so slighted, because harlots, that they had no friend or relation to accompany them. One of them overlaid her child, and in the night exchanged it with the other, *ver. 19, 20.* who was soon aware of the cheat put upon her, and appealed to publick justice to be righted, *ver. 21.*—See, (1.) How bad it is at all times with little children, how uncertain their lives are, and

and to how many dangers they are continually exposed. The age of infancy, is the valley of the shadow of death, and the lamp of life when first lighted, is easily blown out. It is a wonder of mercy, that so few perish in the perils of nursing. (2.) How much better it was in those times with children born in fornication, than commonly it is now. Harlots then loved their children, nursed them, and were loth to part with them; whereas now, they are oft abandoned, exposed, sent far enough, or killed: But thus it is foretold, that *in the last days, perilous times should come*, when people should be without natural affection, 2 Tim. iii. 3.

2. The difficulty of the case. — The question was, Who was the mother of this living child, which was brought into court, to be finally adjudged either to the one, or to the other? Both mothers were vehement in their claims, and shewed a great deal of concern about it: Both were peremptory in their asseverations, It is mine, faith one; Nay, it is mine, faith the other. Neither will own the dead child, though it would be cheaper to bury that, than to maintain the other; but it is the living one they strive for. The living child is therefore the parent's joy, because it is their hopes; and may not the dead children be so? See Jer. xxxi. 17. Now the difficulty of the case was, that there was no evidence on either side. The neighbours, though it is probable some of them were present at the birth and circumcision of the children, yet had not taken so much notice of them, as to be able to distinguish them. To put the parties to the rack, would have been barbarous; not that which had justice on her side, but that which was most hardy, would have had the judgment in her favour. Little weight is to be laid on extorted evidence. Judges and juries have need of wisdom, to find out truth, when it thus lies hid.

3. The determination of it. Solomon having patiently heard what both sides had to say, sums up the evidence, ver. 23. And now the whole court is in expectation, what course Solomon's wisdom will take to find out the truth. One knows not what to say to it; another, perhaps, would determine it by lot. Solomon calls for a sword, and gives orders to divide the living child between the two contenders. Now, (1.) This seemed a ridiculous decision of the case, and in the most brutish manner a cutting the knot which he could not untie. Is this the wisdom of Solomon, think the old sages of the law; little dreaming what he aimed at in it. *The hearts of kings, such kings, are unsearchable*, Prov. xxv. 3. There was a law concerning the dividing of a living ox, and a dead one, Exod. xxi. 35. but that did not reach this case. But, (2.) It proved an effectual discovery of the truth. Some think Solomon did himself discern it, before he made this experiment, by the countenance of the women, and their way of speaking: But by this he gave satisfaction to all the company, and silenced the pretender. — To find out the true mother, he could not try which the child loved best, and must therefore try which loved the child best; both pretended to a motherly affection, but the sincerity of it will be tried when the child is in danger. (1.) She that knew the child was not her own, but in contending for it, stood upon a point of honour, was very well content to have it divided. She that had overlaid her own child, cared not what became of this, so the true mother might not have it. — *Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it.* — By this it appeared, she knew her own title not good, and feared Solomon would find it so, though she little suspected she was betraying herself, but thought Solomon in good earnest. If she had been the true mother, she had forfeited her interest in the child, by agreeing so readily to this bloody decision. But, (2.) She that knew the child was her own, rather than the child should be butchered, gives it up to her adversary. How passionately doth she cry out, *O, my lord, give her the living child*, ver. 26. Let me see it hers, rather than not see it at all. By this tenderness towards the child, it appeared, she was not the careless mother that had overlaid the dead child, but was the true mother of the living one, that could not endure to see its death, having compassion on the son of her womb. The case is plain, (faith Solomon) what need we any witnesses? *Give her the living child*; for you all see by this undissembled compassion, *she is the mother of it.* Let parents shew their love to their children, by taking care of them, especially, by taking care of their souls, and with a holy violence, snatching them as brands out of the burning. They are most likely to have the comfort of children, that do their duty to them. — Satan pretends to the heart of man, but by this it appears he is only a pretender, that he would be content to divide with God, whereas the rightful *Sovereign of the heart* will have all or none.

Lastly, We are told, what a great reputation Solomon got among his people, by this and other instances of his wisdom, which would have a great influence upon the ease of his government; *they feared the king*, ver. 28. highly revered him, durst not in any thing oppose him, and were afraid of doing an unjust thing; for they knew if ever it came before him, he would certainly discover it, *for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him*, i. e. that wisdom which God had promised to endue him with. — *This made his face to shine*, Eccles. viii. 1. this strength-

ned him, Eccles. vii. 19. this was better to him *than weapons of war*, Eccles. ix. 18. for this he was both feared and loved.

C H A P. IV.

An instance of the wisdom God granted to Solomon, we had in the close of the foregoing chapter: In this we have an account of his wealth and prosperity, which was the other branch of the promise there made him. We have here, (1.) The magnificence of his court; his ministers of state, ver. 1—6. and the purveyors of his household, ver. 7—19. and their office, ver. 27, 28. (2.) The provision for his table, ver. 22, 23. (3.) The extent of his dominion, ver. 21, 24. (4.) The numbers, ease, and peace of his subjects, ver. 20, 25. (5.) His stables, ver. 26. (6.) His great reputation for wisdom and learning, ver. 29—34. Thus great was Solomon, but our Lord Jesus was greater than he, Matt. xii. 42. though he took upon him the form of a servant: For divinity in its lowest humiliations, infinitely transcends royalty in its highest elevations.

1. **S**O king Solomon was king over all Israel. 2. And these were the princes which he had, Azariah the son of Zadok, the priest: 3. Elihoreph and Ahiah, the sons of Shisha, scribes: Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud, the recorder. 4. And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the host: and Zadok and Abiathar were the priests. 5. And Azariah the son of Nathan was over the officers: and Zabud the son of Nathan was principal officer, and the king's friend. 6. And Ahishar was over the household: and Adoniram the son of Abda was over the tribute. 7. ¶ And Solomon had twelve officers over all Israel, which provided victuals for the king and his household: each man his month in a year made provision. 8. And these are their names: The son of Hur, in mount Ephraim. 9. The son of Dekar, in Makaz, and in Shaalbim, and Beth-shehem, and Elon-beth-hanan. 10. The son of Hefed, in Aruboth: to him pertained Sochoh, and all the land of Hepher. 11. The son of Abinadab, in all the region of Dor, which had Taphah the daughter of Solomon to wife. 12. Baana the son of Ahilud, to him pertained Taanach and Megiddo, and all Beth-shean, which is by Zartanah beneath Jezreel, from Beth-shean to Abel-meholah, even unto the place that is beyond Jokneam. 13. The son of Geber, in Ramoth-gilead: to him pertained the towns of Jair the son of Manasseh, which are in Gilead: to him also pertained the region of Argob, which is in Bashan, threescore great cities with walls, and brazen bars. 14. Ahinadab the son of Iddo had Mahanaim. 15. Ahimaz was in Naphtali; he also took Basmath the daughter of Solomon to wife. 16. Baanah the son of Hushai was in Asher and in Aloth. 17. Jehoshaphat the son of Paruah, in Issachar. 18. Shimei the son of Elah, in Benjamin. 19. Geber the son of Uri was in the country of Gilead, in the country of Sihon king of the Amorites, and of Og king of Bashan; and he was the only officer which was in the land.

Here is, 1. Solomon upon his throne, ver. 1. *So king Solomon was king*, i. e. He was confirmed and established king over all Israel, and not as his successors, only over two tribes. He was king, i. e. he did the work and duty of a king, with the wisdom God had given him. Those preserve the name and honour of their place, that mind the business of it, and make conscience of that.

2. The great officers of his court; in the choice of which, no doubt, his wisdom much appeared. — It is observable, (1.) That several of them are the same that were in his father's time. Zadok and Abiathar were then priests, 2 Sam. xx. 25. so they were now; only then Abiathar had the precedency, now Zadok; Jehoshaphat was then recorder, or keeper of the great seal, so he was now. Benaiah, in his father's time, was a principal man in military affairs, and so he was now. Shesha was his father's scribe, and his sons were his, ver. 3. Solomon, though a wife man, would not affect to seem wiser than his father in this matter. When sons come to inherit their father's wealth, honour, and power, it is a piece of respect to their memory, *ceteris paribus*, to employ those whom they employed, and trust those whom they trusted. Many pride themselves in being the reverse to their good parents. (2.) The rest were clergymen's sons. His prime minister of state, was Azariah the son of Zadok the priest. Two other of the first rank, were the sons of Nathan the prophet, ver. 5. In preferring them, he testified the grateful respect he had for their good father, whom he loved in the name of a prophet.

3. The purveyors for his household, whose business it was to send in provisions from several parts of the country, for the king's tables

tables and cellars, *ver.* 7. and for his stables, *ver.* 27, 28. That thus, (1.) His house might always be well furnished, at the best hand. Let great men learn hence good house-keeping, and yet good husbandry in their house-keeping; to be generous in spending according to their ability, but prudent in providing. It is the character of the virtuous woman, that she *bringeth her food from afar*, Prov. xxxi. 14. not far fetched, and dear bought, but the contrary, every thing bought where it is cheapest. (2.) That thus he himself, and those who immediately attend him, might be eased of a great deal of care, and the more closely apply themselves to the business of the state, not troubled about much serving, provision for that being got ready to their hand. (3.) That thus all the parts of the kingdom might be equally benefited, by the taking off of the commodities that were the products of their country, and the circulating of the coin. Industry would hereby be encouraged, and consequently wealth increased, even in those tribes that lay most remote from the court. The providence of God extends it self to all *places of his dominions*, Psal. ciii. 22. So should the prudence and care of princes. (4.) The dividing of this trust into so many hands was politick enough, that no one man might be continually burthened with the care of it, nor grow exorbitantly rich with the profit of it; but that Solomon might have those in every district, that having a dependence upon the court, would be serviceable to him and his interest, as there was occasion.

These commissioners of the victualling-office, not for the army or navy; (Solomon was engaged in no war) but for the household, are here named. Several of them only by their sur-names, as great men commonly call their servants, Ben-hur, Ben-dekar, &c. though several of them have also their proper names prefixed. Two of them married Solomon's daughters, Ben Abinadab, *ver.* 11. and Ahimaaz, *ver.* 15. and no disparagement to them to marry men of business. Better match with the officers of their father's court that were Israelites, than with the sons of princes that were *strangers to the covenant of promise*. The son of Geber was in Ramoth-gilead, *ver.* 23. and Geber himself was in the country of Sihon and Og, which included that and Mahanaim, *ver.* 19. He is therefore said to be the only officer in that land, because the other two mentioned, *ver.* 13, 14. depended on him, and were subordinate to him.

20. ¶ Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry. 21. And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms, from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life. 22. ¶ And Solomons provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meal, 23. Ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep; besides harts, and roe-bucks, and fallow-deer, and fatted fowl. 24. For he had dominion over all the region on this side the river, from Tiphshah even to Azzah, over all the kings on this side the river: and he had peace on all sides round about him. 25. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon. 26. ¶ And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen. 27. And those officers provided victual for king Solomon, and for all that came unto king Solomons table, every man in his month: they lacked nothing. 28. Barley also and straw for the horses; and dromedaries brought they unto the place where the officers were, every man according to his charge.

Such a kingdom, and such a court, sure never any prince had, as Solomon's is here described to be.

1. Such a kingdom. Never did the crown of Israel shine so bright, as it did when Solomon wore it; never in his father's days, never in the days of any of his successors, nor was that kingdom ever so glorious a type of the kingdom of the Messiah, as it was then. The account here given of it, is such as fully answers the prophecies which we have concerning it, *Psal.* lxxii. which is a psalm for Solomon, but with reference to Christ. (1.) The territories of this kingdom were large, and its tributaries many, so it was foretold, that he should *have dominion from sea to sea*, *Psal.* lxxii. 8—11. Solomon reigned not only over all Israel, who were his subjects by choice; but over all the neighbour kingdoms, who were his subjects by constraint. All the princes from the river Euphrates north-east, to the border of Egypt south-west, not only added to his honour, by doing him homage, and holding their crowns from him, but added to his wealth; by serving him, and bringing him presents, *ver.* 21. David, by his successful wars, compelled them to this subjection, and Solomon, by his admirable wisdom, made it easy and reasonable, for it is fit the fool should be *servant to the wise in heart*:

If they gave him presents, he gave them instructions, and still taught the people knowledge; not only his own people, but those of other nations; and *wisdom is better than gold*.—He had *peace on all sides*, *ver.* 24. None of all the nations that were subject to him, offered to shake off his yoke, or gave him any disturbance, but rather thought themselves happy in their dependence upon him. Herein his kingdom typified the Messiah's; for to him it is promised, that he shall have the *heathen for his inheritance*, and that *princes shall worship him*, Isa. xlix. 6, 7. liii. 12.

(2.) The subjects of this kingdom, and its inhabitants, were many and merry; very many, very merry. (1.) They were numerous, and the country exceeding populous, *ver.* 20. *Judah and Israel were many*, and that good land sufficient to maintain them all: *They were as the sand of the sea in multitude*. Now was fulfilled the promise made to Abraham, concerning the increase of his seed, *Gen.* xxii. 17. as well as that concerning the extent of their dominion, *Gen.* xv. 18. This was their strength and beauty, the honour of their prince, the terror of their enemies, and an advancement of the wealth of the nation. If they grew so numerous, that the place was any where too strait for them, they might remove with advantage into the countries that were subject to them. God's spiritual Israel are many, at least, they will be so when they come all together, *Rev.* vii. 9. (2.) They were easy, they dwelt safely, or, with confidence and assurance, *ver.* 25. not jealous of their king, or of his officers, not disaffected either to him, or one to another, nor under any apprehension of danger from enemies, foreign or domestick. They were happy, and knew it; safe, and willing to think themselves so: They dwelt every man under *his vine, and fig-tree*. Solomon invaded no man's property, took not to himself their vineyards and olive-yards, as sometimes was the manner of the king, 1 Sam. viii. 19. but what they had they could call their own: But he protected every man in the possession and enjoyment of what was his own. They that had vines and fig-trees, eat the fruit of them themselves; and so great was the peace of the country, that they might, if they pleased, dwell as safely under the shadow of them, as within the walls of a city. Or, because it was usual to have *vines by the side of their houses*, *Psal.* cxxviii. 3. they are said to *dwell under their vines*. (3.) They were cheerful; in the use of their plenty, *eating, and drinking, and making merry*, *ver.* 20. Solomon did not only keep a good table himself, but enabled all his subjects, according to their rank, to do so too, and taught them, that God gave them their abundance, that they might use it soberly and pleasantly, not that they might hoard it up. *There is nothing better*, than for a man to eat *the labour of his hands*, *Eccles.* ii. 24. and that *with a merry heart*, *Eccles.* ix. 7. His father, in the Psalms, had led his people into the comforts and communion with God, and now he led them to the comfortable use of the good things of this life. This pleasant posture of Israel's affairs, extended in place from Dan to Beersheba; no part of the country was exposed, or upon any account uneasy; and it continued for time, *all the days of Solomon*, without any material interruption. Go where you would, and you might see all the marks of plenty, peace and satisfaction. The spiritual peace and joy, and holy security, of all the faithful subjects of the Lord Jesus, was typified by this.—*The kingdom of God is not*, as Solomon's was, *meat and drink*, but that which is infinitely better, *righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*.

2. Such a court Solomon kept, as can scarce be paralleled. We may guess at the vast number of his attendants, and the great resort that was to him, by the provision that was made daily for his table: Of bread so many measures of flour and meal, as it is computed, would richly serve 3000 men; Carellus computes above 48000 men; and the provision of flesh, *ver.* 23. is rather more in proportion. What vast quantities were here of beef, mutton, and venison, and the choicest of all fatted things, as some read that which we translate fatted fowl? Ahasuerus, once in his reign, made a *great feast*, to *show the riches of his kingdom*, *Esth.* i. 3, 4. But it was much more the honour of Solomon, that he kept a constant table, and a very noble one; not of dainties or deceitful meats, he himself witnessed against them, *Prov.* xxiii. 3. but substantial food, for the entertainment of those who came to hear his wisdom. Thus Christ fed those whom he taught, five thousand at a time, more than ever Solomon's table could entertain at once: And all believers have in him a continual feast. Herein he far outdoes Solomon, that he feeds all his subjects, not with the meat that perisheth, but *that which endures to eternal life*.

It added much, both to the strength and glory of Solomon's kingdom, that he had such abundance of horses, forty thousand for chariots, and twelve thousand for his troops: A thousand horse perhaps in every tribe, for the preserving of the publick peace, *ver.* 26. God had commanded that their king should not multiply horses, *Deut.* xvii. 16. nor, according to the account here given, considering the extent and wealth of Solomon's kingdom, did he multiply horses in proportion to his neighbours; for we find even the Philistines, bringing into the field thirty thousand chariots, 1 Sam. xiii. 6. and the Syrians at least forty thousand horse, 2 Sam. x. 18. — The same officers that provided for his house,

house, provided also for his stable, *ver.* 27, 28. Every one knew his place, and work, and time; and so this great court was kept without confusion. — Solomon, that had vast incomes, lived at a vast expence, and perhaps wrote that with application to himself, *Ecc.* v. 11. *When goods increase, they are increased that eat them; and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes, unless withal they have the satisfaction of doing good with them.*

29. ¶ And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding, exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore. 30. And Solomons wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east-country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. 31. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about. 32. And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. 33. And he spake of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. 34. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.

Solomon's wisdom was more his glory than his wealth; a general account of that we have here.

1. The fountain of his wisdom. *God gave it him, ver.* 29. He owns it himself, *Prov.* ii. 6. *The Lord giveth wisdom.* He gave the powers of reason, *Job* xxxviii. 36. preserves and improves them: The ordinary advances of them are owing to his providence, and sanctification of them to his grace; and this extraordinary pitch to which they arrived in Solomon, to a special grant of his favour to him, in answer to prayer.

2. The fulness of it. *He had wisdom and understanding exceeding much.* Great knowledge of distant countries, and the histories of former times; a quickness of thought, strength of memory, and clearness of judgment, such as never any man had: It is called *largeness of heart*, for the heart, is often put for the intellectual powers: He had a vast compass of knowledge, could take things entire, and had an admirable faculty of laying things together. Some by his *largeness of heart*, understand his courage and boldness, and that great assurance with which he delivered his dictates and determinations. Or, it may be meant of his disposition to do good with it. He was very free, and communicative of his knowledge; had the gift of utterance, as well as wisdom; was as free of his learning, as he was of his meat; and grudged neither to any that were about him. Note, It is very desirable, that those who have large gifts of any kind, should have large hearts to use them for the good of others: and this is from the hand of God, *Ecc.* iii. 24. *He shall enlarge the heart,* *Psal.* cxix. 32.

The greatness of Solomon's wisdom is illustrated by comparison. Chaldea and Egypt were nations famous for learning; thence the Greeks borrowed theirs; but the greatest scholars of either of these nations came short of Solomon, *ver.* 30. If nature excel art, much more doth grace. The knowledge which God gives by special favour, goes beyond that which man gets by his own labour. Some wise men there were in Solomon's time, that were in great repute; particularly Heman, and others who were Levites, and employed by David in the temple musick, *1 Chron.* xv. 19. Heman was his *Seer in the words of God*, *1 Chron.* xxv. 5. Chalcol and Darda were own brothers, and they also were noted for learning and wisdom; but *Solomon excelled them all*, *ver.* 30. he posed them, quite outdid them; his counsel was much more valuable.

3. The fame of it. It was talked of in all nations round about. His great wealth and glory made his wisdom much more illustrious, and gave him those opportunities of shewing it, which they cannot have that live in poverty and obscurity. The jewel of wisdom may receive great advantage by the setting of it.

4. The fruits of it; by these the tree is known: he did not bury his talent, but shewed his wisdom.

1. In his compositions. Those in divinity are not mentioned here, which he wrote by divine inspiration, for they are extant, and will remain to the world's end monuments of his wisdom; and are, as other parts of scripture, of use to make us *wise unto salvation*. But besides those, it appears by what he spake, or seemed to be written from him, (1.) That he was a moralist, and a man of great prudence, for he spake *three thousand proverbs*, wise sayings, apophthegms, of admirable use for the conduct of human life. The world is much governed by proverbs, and was never better furnished with useful ones, than by Solomon. — Whether those proverbs of Solomon that we have were any part of the three thousand, is uncertain. (2.) That he was a poet, and a man of great wit. *His songs were a thousand and five*, of which one only is extant, because that only was divinely inspired, which is therefore called his Song of songs. His wise in-

structions were communicated by proverbs, that they might be familiar to them he designed to teach, and ready on all occasions; by songs, that they might be pleasant, and move the affections. (3.) That he was a natural philosopher, and a man of great learning and insight into the mysteries of nature: from his own and others observations and experiences, he wrote both of plants and animals, *ver.* 33. descriptions of their natures and qualities, and (some think) of the medicinal use of them.

2. In his converse. — There came persons from all parts, who were more inquisitive after knowledge than their neighbours, to hear the wisdom of Solomon, *ver.* 34. Kings that had heard of it, sent their ambassadors to hear it, and to bring them instructions from it. — Solomon's court was the staple of learning, and the rendezvous of philosophers, *i. e.* the lovers of wisdom, who all came to light their candle at his lamp, and to borrow from him. Let those who magnify the modern learning above that of the ancients, produce such a treasury of knowledge any where in these latter ages, as that was which Solomon was master of; yet this puts an honour upon human learning, that Solomon was praised for it, and recommends it to the great men of the earth, as well worthy their diligent search. But, lastly, Solomon was herein a type of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and hid for use, for he is made of God to us wisdom.

C H A P. V.

The great work which Solomon was raised up to do, was the building of the temple; his wealth and wisdom were given him to qualify him for that: In this especially he was to be a type of Christ, for He shall build the temple of the Lord, *Zech.* vi. 12. In this chapter we have an account of the preparations he made for that and his other buildings. Gold and silver his good father had prepared in abundance, but timber and stones he must get ready; and about these we have him treating with Hiram king of Tyre. (1.) Hiram congratulated his accession to the throne, *ver.* 1. (2.) Solomon signified to him his design to build the temple, and desired him to furnish him with workmen, *ver.* 2—6. (3.) Hiram agreed to do it, *ver.* 7—9. (4.) Solomon's work is accordingly well done, and Hiram's workmen well paid, *ver.* 10—18.

1. **A**ND Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants unto Solomon (for he had heard that they had anointed him king in the room of his father) for Hiram was ever a lover of David. 2. And Solomon sent to Hiram, saying, 3. Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the LORD his God, for the wars which were about him on every side, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. 4. But now the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary, nor evil occurrent. 5. And behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room; he shall build an house unto my name. 6. Now therefore command thou, that they hew me cedar-trees out of Lebanon, and my servants shall be with thy servants: and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants, according to all that thou shalt appoint: for thou knowest that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber, like unto the Sidonians. 7. ¶ And it came to pass, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly, and said, Blessed be the LORD this day, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people. 8. And Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have considered the things which thou sentest to me for: and I will do all thy desire concerning timber of cedar, and concerning timber of fir. 9. My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon unto the sea: and I will convey them by sea in flotes, unto the place that thou shalt appoint me, and will cause them to be discharged there, and thou shalt receive them: and thou shalt accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household.

We have here an account of the amicable correspondence that was between Solomon and Hiram. Tyre was a famous trading city that lay close upon the sea, in the border of Israel; its inhabitants (as should seem) none of the devoted nations, nor ever at enmity with Israel; and therefore David never offered to destroy them, but lived in friendship with them. It is said here of Hiram their king, that he was *ever a lover of David*; and we have reason to think he was a worshipper of the true God, and had himself renounced, though he could not reform the idolatry of his city. David's character will win the affections even of those that are without. Here is,

1. Hiram's embassy of compliment to Solomon, *ver. 1.* He sent, as is usual among princes, to condole the death of David, and to renew his alliances with him upon his succession to the government. It is good keeping up friendship and communion with the families, in which religion is uppermost.

2. Solomon's embassy of business to Hiram, sent, it is likely, by messengers of his own. In wealth, honour and power, Hiram was very much inferior to Solomon, yet Solomon has occasion to be beholden to him, and begs his favour. Let us never look with disdain on those below us, because we know not how soon we may need them. Solomon, in his letter to Hiram, acquaints him, (1.) With his design to build a temple to the honour of God. Some think that temples among the heathen took their first rise and copy from the tabernacle which Moses erected in the wilderness, and that there were none before that; however, there were many houses built in honour of the false gods, before this was built in honour of the God of Israel, so little is external splendor a mark of the true church. Solomon tells Hiram (who was himself no stranger to the affair) (1.) That David's wars were an obstruction to him, that he could not build this temple, though he designed it, *ver. 3.* They took up much of his time, and thoughts, and cares; were a constant expence to him, and a constant employment of his subjects: so that he could not do it so well as it must be done, and therefore it not being essential to religion, he must leave it to be done by his successor. See what need we have to pray, that God will give peace in our time, because in time of war, the building of the gospel temple commonly goes slowly on. — (2.) That his peace was an opportunity to him to build it, and therefore he resolved to set about it presently. *God has given me rest* both at home and abroad, and there is no adversary, *ver. 4.* no Satan, so the word is; no instrument of Satan to oppose it, or to divert us from it. Satan doth all he can to hinder temple-work, *1 Thess. ii. 18. Zech. iii. 1.* but when he is bound (*Rev. xx. 2.*) we should be busy. — When there is no evil occurrent, then let us be vigorous and zealous in that which is good, and get it forward. When the churches have rest, let them be edified, *Acts ix. 31.* Days of peace and prosperity present us with a fair gale, which we must account for, if we improve not. — As God's providence excited Solomon to think of building the temple, by giving him wealth and leisure; so his promise encouraged him. God had told David, that his son should build him an house, *ver. 5.* he will take it as a pleasure to be thus employed, and will not lose the honour designed him by that promise. It may stir us up much to good undertakings, to be assured of good success in them. Let God's promise quicken our endeavours.

(2.) With his desire that Hiram would assist him herein. Lebanon was the place whence timber must be had, a noble forest in the north of Canaan, particularly expressed in the grant of that land to Israel, *all Lebanon*, *Josh. xiii. 5.* So that Solomon was proprietor of all its products; the cedars of Lebanon are spoken of as in a special manner the planting of the Lord, *Psal. civ. 16.* being designed for Israel's use, and particularly for temple service. But Solomon owns, though the trees were his, the Israelites could not skill to hew timber like the Sidonians; who were Hiram's subjects. Canaan was a land of wheat and barley, *Deut. viii. 8.* which employed Israel in the affairs of husbandry, so that they were not at all versed in manufactures: in them the Sidonians excelled. Israel, in the things of God, is a wise and understanding people; and yet in curious arts inferior to their neighbours: true piety is a much more valuable gift of heaven, than the highest degree of ingenuity. Better be an Israelite skilful in the law, than a Sidonian skilful to hew timber. But the case being thus, Solomon courts Hiram to send him workmen, and promises, *ver. 6.* both to assist them, *My servants shall be with thy servants*, to work under them; and to pay them, *Unto thee will I give hire for thy servants*, for the labourer, even in church-work, though it be indeed its own wages, is worthy of his hire. — The evangelical prophet, foretelling the glory of the church in the days of the Messiah, seems to allude to this story, *Isa. lx.* where he prophesies, (1.) That the sons of strangers (such were the Tyrians and Sidonians) should build up the wall of the gospel temple, *ver. 10.* Ministers were raised up among the Gentiles, for the edifying of the body of Christ. (2.) That the glory of Lebanon should be brought to it to beautify it, *ver. 13.* All external endowments and advantages should be made serviceable to the interests of Christ's kingdom.

3. Hiram's reception of, and return to this message.

1. He received it with great satisfaction to himself. He rejoiced greatly, *ver. 6.* that Solomon trod in his father's steps, and carried on his designs, and was likely to be so great a blessing to his kingdom. This Hiram's generous spirit rejoiced in, and not only in the prospect he had of making an advantage to himself by Solomon's employing him. What he had the pleasure of, he gave God the praise of, *Blessed be the Lord, which has given to David* (who was himself a wise man) *a wise son, to rule over this great people.* — See here, 1. With what pleasure Hiram speaks of Solomon's wisdom, and the extent of his dominion, and let us learn not to envy others either those secular advantages, or those endowments of the mind wherein they excel us. What a

great comfort it is to those that wish well to the Israel of God, to see religion and wisdom kept up in families from one generation to another, especially in great families, and those that have great influence on others: and where it is so, God must have the glory of it. If to godly parents be given a godly seed, *Mal. ii. 15.* it is a token for good, and a happy indication, that the entail of the blessing shall not be cut off.

2. He returned it with great satisfaction to Solomon, granting him what he desired, and shewing himself very forward to assist him in this great good work to which he was laying his hand. We have here his articles of agreement with Solomon concerning this affair. In which we may observe Hiram's prudence. (1.) He deliberated upon the proposal, before he returned an answer, *ver. 8. I have considered the things.* — It is common for those that make bargains rashly, afterwards to wish them unmade again. The virtuous woman considers a field, and then buys it, *Prov. xxxi. 16.* Those do not lose time, who take time to consider. (2.) He descended to particulars in the articles, that there might be no misunderstanding afterwards, to occasion a quarrel. Solomon had spoken of hewing the trees, *ver. 6.* and Hiram agrees to what he desired concerning that, *ver. 8.* but nothing had been said concerning carriage; that matter therefore must be settled: Land-carriage would be very troublesome and chargeable, he therefore undertakes to bring all the timber down from Lebanon by sea; a coasting voyage. Conveyance by water is a great convenience to trade, for which God is to have praise, who taught man that discretion. Observe what a punctual bargain Hiram made; Solomon must appoint the place where the timber shall be delivered, and thither Hiram will undertake to bring it, and be responsible for its safety. As the Sidonians excelled the Israelites in timber-work, so they did in sailing, for Tyre and Sidon were situate at the entry of the sea, *Ezek. xxvii. 3.* they therefore were fittest to take care of the water-carriage, *tractent fabrilis fabri.* And, lastly, If Hiram undertake for the work, and doth all Solomon's desire concerning the timber, *ver. 8.* he justly expects that Solomon shall undertake for the wages, *Thou shalt accomplish my desire in giving food for my household*, *ver. 9.* not only for the workmen, but for my own family. If Tyre supplies Israel with craftsmen, Israel will supply Tyre with corn, *Ezek. xxvii. 17.* Thus, by the wise disposal of providence, one country has need of another, and is benefited by another, that there may be mutual correspondence and dependence, to the glory of God our common parent.

10. So Hiram gave Solomon cedar-trees, and fir-trees, according to all his desire. 11. And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat for food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oyl: thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year. 12. And the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon, and they two made a league together. 13. ¶ And king Solomon raised a levy out of all Israel; and the levy was thirty thousand men. 14. And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month by courses: a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home: and Adoniram was over the levy. 15. And Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bare burdens, and fourscore thousand hewers in the mountains: 16. Besides the chief of Solomons officers which were over the work, three thousand and three hundred, which ruled over the people that wrought in the work. 17. And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house. 18. And Solomons builders, and Hirams builders did hew them, and the stone-squarers: so they prepared timber and stones to build the house.

Here is, 1. The performance of the agreement between Solomon and Hiram, each of the parties made good their engagement. (1.) Hiram delivered Solomon the timber according to his bargain, *ver. 10.* The trees were Solomon's, but perhaps the workmanship was of more value than the trees, (*materiam superabat opus*) and that was Hiram's; he is therefore said to deliver the trees. (2.) Solomon conveyed the corn to Hiram which he had promised him, *ver. 11.* Thus let justice be followed, as the expression is, *Deut. xvi. 20. it is justice on both sides in every bargain.*

2. The confirmation of the friendship that was between them hereby. *God gave Solomon wisdom*, *ver. 12.* that was more and better than any thing Hiram did or could give him; but this made Hiram love him, and enabled Solomon to improve his kindness, so that they were both willing to ripen their mutual love into a mutual league, that it might be lasting; it is wisdom to strengthen our friendship with those that we find to be honest and fair, lest new friends prove not so firm and so kind as old ones.

3. The labourers whom Solomon employed in preparing materials for the temple. (1.) Some that were Israelites that were employed in the more easy and honourable part of the work, felling trees,

and helping to square them; in conjunction with Hiram's servants; for this he appointed thirty thousand; but employed only ten thousand at a time, so that for one month's work they had two month's vacation, both for rest and for the dispatch of their own affairs at home; *ver.* 13, 14. It was temple-service; yet Solomon takes care they shall not be over-worked; great men ought to consider that their servants must rest as well as they. (2.) Others that were captives of other nations, who were to bear burthens, and to hew stone, *ver.* 15. and we read not that these had their resting times as the other had; for they were doomed to servitude. (3.) There were some employed as directors and overseers, *ver.* 16. three thousand three hundred that ruled over the people; and they were as necessary and useful in their place as the labourers in theirs; here were many hands and many eyes employed, for preparation was now to be made, not only for the temple, but for all the rest of Solomon's buildings, both at Jerusalem and here in the forest of Lebanon; and in other places of his dominion, of which see *chap.* ix. 17, 18, 19. He speaks of the vastness of his undertakings, *Ecc.* ii. 4. *I made me great works*, which required this vast number of workmen.

4. The laying of the foundation of the temple, for that is the building his heart is chiefly upon, and therefore he begins with that, *ver.* 17, 18. It should seem Solomon was himself present and president at the founding of the temple, and that the first stone, (as has been usual in famous buildings) was laid with some solemnity. *Solomon commanded, and they brought costly stones* for the foundation; he would do every thing like himself, generously, and therefore would have some of the costliest stones laid, or buried rather, in the foundation; though, being out of sight, worse might have served. Christ, who is laid for a foundation, is an elect and precious stone, *Isa.* xxviii. 16. and the foundations of the church are said to be *laid with sapphires*, *Isa.* liv. 11. compare *Rev.* xxi. 19. That sincerity which is our gospel perfection, obligeth us to lay our foundation firm, and to bestow most pains on that part of our religion which lies out of the sight of men.

C H A P. VI.

Great and long preparation had been in making for the building of the temple, and here at length comes an account of the building of it: a noble piece of work it was, one of the wonders of the world, and taking in its spiritual significancy, one of the glories of the church. Here is, (1.) The time when it was built, ver. 1. and how long it was in the building, ver. 37, 38. (2.) The silence with which it was built, ver. 7. (3.) The dimensions of it, ver. 2, 3. (4.) The message God sent to Solomon when it was in the building, ver. 11—13. (5.) The particulars; windows, ver. 4. chambers, ver. 5, 6, 8, 9, 10. the walls and flooring, ver. 14—18. the oracle, ver. 19—22. the cherubims, ver. 23—30. the doors, ver. 31—33. and the inner court, ver. 35. Many learned men have well bestowed their pains in expounding the description here given of the temple according to the rules of architecture, and solving the difficulties which upon first sight they find in it; but in that matter having nothing new to offer, we will not be particular or curious; it was then well understood, and every man's eyes that saw this glorious structure, furnished him with the best critical exposition of this chapter.

1. **A**ND it came to pass in the four hundred and fourscore year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomons reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD. 2. And the house which king Solomon built for the LORD, the length thereof was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits. 3. And the porch before the temple of the house, twenty cubits was the length thereof, according to the breadth of the house; and ten cubits was the breadth thereof, before the house. 4. And for the house he made windows of narrow lights. 5. ¶ And against the wall of the house he built chambers round about, against the walls of the house round about, *both* of the temple, and of the oracle: and he made chambers round about. 6. The innermost chamber was five cubits broad, and the middle was six cubits broad, and the third was seven cubits broad: for without in the wall of the house he made narrowed rests round about, that the beams should not be fastened in the walls of the house. 7. And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone, made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer, nor ax, nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building. 8. The door for the middle chamber was in the right side of the house: and they went up with winding stairs into the middle cham-

ber, and out of the middle into the third. 9. So he built the house, and finished it; and covered the house with beams and boards of cedar. 10. And then he built chambers against all the house, five cubits high: and they rested on the house with timber of cedar.

Here, 1. The temple is called *the house of the Lord*, *ver.* 1. because it was (1.) Directed and modelled by him. Infinite wisdom was the architect, and gave David the plan or pattern by the Spirit, not by word of mouth only, but for the greater certainty and exactness, in writing, *1 Chron.* xxviii. 12, 19. and he had given to Moses in the mount a draft of the tabernacle. (2.) Dedicated and devoted to him, and to his honour, to be employed in his service, so his, as never any other house was, for he manifested his glory in it, so as never in any other, in a way agreeable to that dispensation; for when there were carnal ordinances, there was a *worldly sanctuary*, *Heb.* ix. 1, 10. This gave it its *beauty of holiness*, that it was *the house of the Lord*, which far transcended all its other beauties.

2. The time when it began to be built is exactly set down. (1.) It was just 480 years after the bringing of the children of Israel out of Egypt; allowing 40 years to Moses, 17 to Joshua, 299 to the Judges, 40 to Eli, 40 to Samuel and Saul, 40 to David, and 4 to Solomon before he began the work, we have the just sum of 480.—So long it was after that holy state was founded before that holy house was built, which in less than 430 years was burnt by Nebuchadnezzar; it was thus deferred, because Israel had by their sins rendered themselves unworthy of this honour, and because God would shew how little he values external pomp and splendor in his service, he was in no haste for a temple. David's tent, which was clean and convenient, though it was neither stately nor rich, nor, for ought appears, ever consecrated, is called *the house of the Lord*, *2 Sam.* xii. 20. and served as well as Solomon's temple; yet when God gave Solomon great wealth he put it into his heart thus to employ it, and graciously accepted him, chiefly because it was to be a shadow of good things to come, *Heb.* ix. 9.—(2.) It was in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, the three first years being taken up in settling the affairs of his kingdom, that he might not find any embarrassment from them in this work; it is not time lost which is spent in composing our selves for the work of God, and disentangling our selves from every thing which might distract or divert us; during this time he was adding to the preparations which his father had made, *1 Chron.* xxii. 14. hewing the stone, squaring the timber, and getting every thing ready, so that he is not to be blamed for slackness in deferring it so long; we are truly serving God, when we are preparing for his service, and furnishing our selves for it.

3. The materials are brought in ready for their place, *ver.* 7. so ready, that there was *neither hammer nor ax heard in the house while it was in building*. In all building Solomon prescribes it as a rule of prudence to *prepare the work in the field*, and afterwards build, *Prov.* xxiv. 27. But here it seems the preparation was more than ordinary full and exact, to that degree, that when the several parts came to be put together there was nothing defective to be added, nothing amiss to be amended; it was to be the temple of the God of peace, and therefore no iron tool must be heard in it; quietness and silence both become and befriend religious exercises; God's work should be done with *as much care* and *as little noise* as may be; the temple was thrown down with *axes and hammers*, and they that did it roared in the midst of the congregation, *Psal.* lxxiv. 4, 6. but it was built up in silence; clamour and violence often hinder, but never further the work of God.

4. The dimensions are laid down, *ver.* 2, 3. according to the rules of proportion. Some observe that the length and breadth was just double to that of the tabernacle. Now Israel was grown more numerous, the place of their meeting needed to be enlarged, *Isa.* liv. 1, 2. and now they were grown richer, they were the better able to enlarge it; where God sows plentifully, he expects to reap so.

5. An account of the windows, *ver.* 4. they were *broad within, and narrow without*, *Marg.* such should the eyes of our mind be; reflecting nearer on our selves than on other people, looking much within, to judge our selves, but little without, to censure our brethren.—The narrowness of the lights intimated the darkness of that dispensation in comparison with the gospel-day.

The chambers are described, *ver.* 5, 6. which were as pentces to the temple, in which the utensils of the tabernacle were carefully laid up; the priests dressed and undressed themselves, and left the clothes in which they ministered; probably in some of these chambers they feasted upon the holy things, they served as vestries. Solomon was not so intent upon the magnificence of the house as to neglect the conveniences that were requisite for the offices thereof, that every thing might be done decently and in order; care was taken that the beams should not be fastened in the walls to weaken them, *ver.* 6. let not the church's strength be impaired, under pretence of adding to its beauty or convenience.

11. ¶ And the word of the LORD came to Solomon; saying, 12. Concerning this house which thou art in building, if thou wilt walk in my statutes; and execute my

my judgments, and keep all my commandments to walk in them: then will I perform my word with thee, which I spake unto David thy father. 13. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel. 14. So Solomon built the house, and finished it.

Here is, 1. The word God sent to Solomon, when he was engaged in building the temple; God let him know that he took notice of what he was doing, *the house he was now building*, ver. 12. None employ themselves for God, but his eye is upon them, *I know thy works*, thy good works; he assured him, that upon condition he would proceed and persevere, in obedience to the divine law, and keep in the way of duty, and the true worship of God, divine loving-kindness should be drawn out, both to him himself, *I will perform my word with thee*; and to his kingdom, Israel shall be ever owned as my people, *I will dwell among them*, and not forsake them; this word God sent him (probably, by a prophet;) (1.) That by the promise, he might be encouraged and comforted in his work: perhaps, sometimes the great care, expence, and fatigue of it, made him ready to wish he had never begun it, but this would help him through the difficulties of it, that the promised establishment of his family and kingdom, would abundantly recompense all his pains; an eye to the promise will carry us cheerfully through our work, and those who wish well to the publick, will think nothing too much that they can do, to secure and perpetuate to it the tokens of God's presence.—(2.) That, by the condition annexed, he might be awakened to consider, that though he built the temple never so strong, the glory of it would soon depart, unless he and his people continued to *walk in God's statutes*; God plainly lets him know, that all this charge he and his people were at, in erecting this temple, would neither excuse them from obedience to the law of God, nor shelter them from his judgments in case of disobedience; keeping God's commandments is better, and more pleasing to him, than building churches.

2. The work Solomon did for God, *so he built the house*, ver. 14. so animated by the message God had sent him, so admonished, not to expect that God should own his building, unless he were obedient to his laws; Lord, I proceed upon these terms, being firmly resolved to walk in thy statutes; the strictness of God's government will never drive a good man from his service, but quicken him in it; Solomon built and finished, he went on with it, and God went along with him till it was compleated; it is spoken both to God's praise and his; he grew not weary of the work, met not with any obstructions, as *Ezra iv. 24.* did not out-build his pocket, nor do it by the halves, but having begun to build, was both able and willing to finish, for he was a wise builder.

15. And he built the walls of the house within with boards of cedar, both the floor of the house, and the walls of the cieling: and he covered them on the inside with wood, and covered the floor of the house with planks of fir. 16. And he built twenty cubits on the sides of the house, both the floor and the walls with boards of cedar: he even built them for it within, even for the oracle, even for the most holy place. 17. And the house, that is, the temple before it, was forty cubits long. 18. And the cedar of the house within was carved with knops, and open flowers: all was cedar, there was no stone seen. 19. And the oracle he prepared in the house within, to set there the ark of the covenant of the LORD. 20. And the oracle in the fore-part was twenty cubits in length, and twenty cubits in breadth, and twenty cubits in the height thereof: and he overlaid it with pure gold, and so covered the altar which was of cedar. 21. So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure gold: and he made a partition, by the chains of gold before the oracle, and he overlaid it with gold. 22. And the whole house he overlaid with gold, until he had finished all the house: also the whole altar that was by the oracle he overlaid with gold. 23. ¶ And within the oracle he made two cherubims of olive-tree, each ten cubits high. 24. And five cubits was the one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the other wing of the cherub: from the uttermost part of the one wing, unto the uttermost part of the other, were ten cubits. 25. And the other cherub was ten cubits: both the cherubims were of one measure, and one size. 26. The height of the one cherub was ten cubits, and so was it of the other cherub. 27. And he set the cherubims within the inner house; and they stretched forth the wings of the cherubims, so that the wing of the one touched the one wall, and the wing of the other cherub

touched the other wall: and their wings touched one another in the midst of the house. 28. And he overlaid the cherubims with gold. 29. And he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubims, and palm-trees, and open flowers, within and without. 30. And the floor of the house he overlaid with gold, within and without. 31. ¶ And for the entering of the oracle he made doors of olive-tree: the lintel and side-posts were a fifth part of the wall. 32. The two doors also were of olive-tree; and he carved upon them carvings of cherubims, and palm-trees, and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold, and spread gold upon the cherubims, and upon the palm-trees. 33. So also made he for the door of the temple, posts of olive-tree, a fourth part of the wall. 34. And the two doors were of fir-tree; the two leaves of the one door were folding, and the two leaves of the other door were folding. 35. And he carved thereon cherubims, and palm-trees, and open flowers: and covered them with gold, fitted upon the carved work. 36. ¶ And he built the inner court with three rows of hewed stones, and a row of cedar-beams. 37. ¶ In the fourth year was the foundation of the house of the LORD laid, in the month Zif. 38. And in the eleventh year, in the month Bul (which is the eighth month) was the house finished throughout all the parts thereof, and according to all the fashion of it: So was he seven years in building it.

Here is, 1. The wainscot of the temple described, it was of cedar, ver. 15. which was strong and durable, and of a very sweet smell; the wainscot was curiously carved with knops (like eggs or apples) and flowers, no doubt, as the fashion then was, ver. 18.

2. The gilding, it was not like ours, washed over, but the whole house, all the inside of the temple, ver. 22. even the floor, ver. 30. he overlaid with gold, and the most holy place with pure gold, ver. 21. Solomon would stick at no charge to make it every way sumptuous, gold was under foot there, as it should be in all the living temples, the abundance of it lessened its worth.

3. The oracle, or speaking place, (for so the word signifies) the holy of holies, so called, because from thence God spake to Moses, and perhaps to the high priest, when he consulted with the breast-plate of judgment; in this place, the ark of the covenant was to be set, ver. 19. Solomon made every thing new, and more magnificent than it had been, but the ark only, and that was still the same that Moses made, with its mercy-seat and cherubims; that was the token of God's presence, which is always the same with his people, whether they meet in tent or temple, and changes not with their condition.

4. The cherubims. Besides those at the ends of the mercy-seat which covered the ark, (1.) Solomon set up two more, very large ones, images of young men, (as some think) with wings made of olive-wood, and all overlaid with gold, ver. 23, &c. This most holy place was much larger than that in the tabernacle, and therefore the ark would seem lost in it, and the dead wall would have been unsightly if it had not been thus adorned. (2.) He carved cherubims upon all the walls of the house, ver. 29. The heathen set up images of their gods, and worshipped them, these were designed to represent the servants and attendants of the God of Israel, the holy angels, not to be themselves worshipped, see thou do it not, but to shew how great he is whom we are to worship.

5. The doors. The folding doors that led into the oracle, were but a fifth part of the wall, ver. 31. those into the temple were a fourth part, ver. 33. but both were beautified with cherubims engraven on them, ver. 32, 35.

6. The inner court, in which the brazen altar was, and at which the priests ministered; this was separated from the court, where the people were but by a low wall, three rows of hewed stone topped with a cornish of cedar, ver. 36. that over it the people might see what was done, and hear what the priests said to them, for, when under that dispensation, they were not kept wholly either in the dark, or at a distance.

Lastly, The time spent in this building, it was but seven years and a half from the founding to the finishing of it, ver. 38. considering the vastness and fineness of the building, and the many appurtenances to it, which were necessary to fit it for use, it was soon done; Solomon was in earnest in it, had money enough, had nothing to divert him from it, and many hands made quick work; he finished it (as the margin reads it) with all the appurtenances thereof, and with all the ordinances thereof, not only built the place, but set the work a doing which it was built for.

Let us now see what was typified by this temple.

1. Christ is the true temple, he himself spake of the temple of his body, *Joh. ii. 21.* God himself prepared him his body, *Heb.*

Heb. x. 5. In him dwelt the fulness of the Godhead, as the Shechinah in the temple, in him meet all God's spiritual Israel, through him we have access with confidence to God; all the angels of God, those blessed cherubims, have a charge to worship him.

2. Every believer is a living temple, in whom the Spirit of God dwelleth, *1 Cor. iii. 16. even the body is so by virtue of its union with the soul, 1 Cor. vi. 19.* We are not only wonderfully made by the divine providence, but more wonderfully made anew by the divine grace; this living temple is built upon Christ as its foundation, and will be perfected in due time.

3. The gospel church is the mystical temple, it grows to a *holy temple in the Lord, Eph. ii. 21.* enriched and beautified with the gifts and graces of the Spirit, as Solomon's temple with gold and precious stones; only Jews built the tabernacle, but Gentiles join with them in building the temple, even strangers and foreigners, are built up an *habitation of God, Eph. ii. 19, 22.* The temple was divided into the holy place, and the most holy, the courts of it into the outer and inner, so there is the visible and the invisible church; the door into the temple was wider than that into the oracle; many enter into profession, that come short of salvation. This temple is built firm, upon a rock, not to be taken down, as the tabernacle of the Old Testament was. The temple was long in preparing, but was built at last, the top stone of the gospel church will at length be brought forth with shoutings, and pity there should be the clashing of axes and hammers in the building of it; angels are ministering spirits, attending the church on all sides, and all the members of it.

4. Heaven is the everlasting temple, there the church will be fixed, and no longer moveable; the streets of the new Jerusalem, in allusion to the flooring of the temple, are said to be of pure gold, *Rev. xxi. 21.* the cherubims there always attend the throne of glory. The temple was uniform, and in heaven there is the perfection of beauty and harmony. In Solomon's temple, there was no noise of axes and hammers, every thing is quiet and serene in heaven; all that shall be stones in that building, must in the present state of probation and preparation, be fitted and made ready for it, must be hewn and squared by the divine grace, and so made meet for a place there.

C H A P. VII.

As in the story of David, one chapter of wars and victories follows another, so in the story of Solomon, one chapter of his buildings follows another. In this chapter we have, (1.) His fitting up several buildings for himself and his own use, ver. 1—12. (2.) His furnishing the temple which he had built for God, 1. With two pillars, ver. 13—22. 2. With a molten sea, ver. 23—26. 3. With ten bases of brass, ver. 27—37. and ten lavers upon them, ver. 38, 39. 4. With all the other utensils of the temple, ver. 40—50. 5. With the things that his father had dedicated, ver. 57. The particular description of these things was not needless when it was written, nor is it now useless.

1. **B**UT Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house. 2. ¶ He built also the house of the forest of Lebanon; the length thereof was a hundred cubits, and the breadth thereof fifty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits, upon four rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams upon the pillars. 3. And it was covered with cedar above upon the beams, that lay on forty five pillars, fifteen in a row. 4. And there were windows in three rows, and light was against light in three ranks. 5. And all the doors and posts were square, with the windows: and light was against light in three ranks. 6. ¶ And he made a porch of pillars; the length thereof was fifty cubits, and the breadth thereof thirty cubits: and the porch was before them: and the other pillars and the thick beam were before them. 7. ¶ Then he made a porch for the throne, where he might judge, even the porch of judgment: and it was covered with cedar from one side of the floor to the other. 8. And his house where he dwelt, had another court within the porch, which was of the like work. Solomon made also an house for Pharaoh's daughter (whom he had taken to wife) like unto this porch. 9. All these were of costly stones, according to the measures of hewed stones, sawed with saws, within and without, even from the foundation unto the coping, and so on the outside toward the great court. 10. And the foundation was of costly stones, even great stones; stones of ten cubits, and stones of eight cubits. 11. And above were costly stones (after the measures of hewed stones) and cedars. 12. And the great court round about was with three rows of hewed stones, and a row of cedar

beams, both for the inner court of the house of the LORD, and for the porch of the house.

Never had any man so much of the spirit of building as Solomon had, nor built to better purpose, he began with the temple, built for God first, and then all his other buildings were comfortable; the surest foundations of a lasting prosperity are those which are laid in an early piety, *Matt. vi. 33.*

1. He built a house for himself, *ver. 1. where he dwelt, ver. 8.* His father had built a good house, but it was no reflection upon his father for him to build a better, in proportion to the estate wherewith God had blessed him; much of the comfort of this life, some think, lies in an agreeable house. He was thirteen years building this house, whereas he built the temple in little more than seven years, not that he was more exact, but less eager and intent in building his own house, than in building God's, he was in no haste for his own palace, but impatient till the temple was finished, and fit for use; thus we ought to prefer God's honour before our own ease and satisfaction.

2. He built the house of the forest of Lebanon, *ver. 2.* supposed to be a country seat near Jerusalem, so called from the pleasantness of its situation, and the trees that encompassed it; I rather incline to think, it was a house built in the forest of Lebanon itself, whither (though far distant from Jerusalem) Solomon (having so many chariots and horses, and those dispersed into chariot cities, which probably were his stages) might frequently retire with ease; it doth not appear that his throne, mentioned *ver. 7.* was at the house of the forest of Lebanon; and it was not at all improper to put his shields there, as his magazine. Express notice is taken of his buildings, not only in Jerusalem, but in Lebanon, *chap. ix. 19.* and we read of the tower of Lebanon, which looks towards Damascus, *Cant. vii. 4.* which probably was part of this house. A particular account is given of this house, That being built in Lebanon, a place famed for cedars, the pillars, and beams, and roof, were all cedar, *ver. 2, 3.* and it being designed for pleasant prospects, there was three tire of windows on each side, light against light, *ver. 4, 5.* or, as it may be read, prospect against prospect. Those whose lot is cast in the country, may be well reconciled to a country life by this, that some of the greatest princes have thought those the most pleasant of their days, which they have spent in their country retirements.

3. He built piazza's before one of his houses, either that at Jerusalem, or that in Lebanon, which were very famous, a porch or pillars, *ver. 6.* either for an exchange, or a guard house, or for those to walk in, that attended him about business, till they could have audience, or for state and magnificence: He himself speaks of wisdom's building her house, and hewing out her seven pillars, *Prov. ix. 1.* for the shelter of those, that, three verses before, *chap. viii. 34.* are said to watch daily at her gates, and to wait at the posts of her door.

4. At his house where he dwelt in Jerusalem, he built a great hall, or porch of judgment, where was set the throne, or king's bench, for the trial of causes, in which he himself was appealed to, (*Placita coram ipso rege tenenda*) and this was richly wainscotted with cedar, from the floor to the roof, *ver. 7.* he had there also another court within the porch, nearer his house, of the like work, for his attendants to walk in, *ver. 8.*

5. He built a house for his wife, where she kept her court, *ver. 8.* it is said to be like the porch, because built of cedar, like it, though not in the same form; this, no doubt, was near adjoining to his own palace; yet, perhaps, if it had been as near as it ought to have been, Solomon would not have multiplied wives as he did.

The wonderful magnificence of all these buildings is taken notice of, *ver. 9, &c.* all the materials were the best in their kind, the foundation stones were costly for their bigness, four or five yards square, or, at least, so many yards long, *ver. 10.* and the stones of the building, costly for the workmanship, hewed and sawn, and in all respects finely wrought, *ver. 9, 11.* the court of his own house was like that of the temple, *ver. 12.* compare *chap. vi. 36.* so well did he like the model of God's courts, that he made his own by it.

13. ¶ And king Solomon sent and fet Hiram out of Tyre. 14. He was a widows son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass: and he was filled with wisdom and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass; and he came to king Solomon, and wrought all his work. 15. For he cast two pillars of brass of eighteen cubits high apiece: and a line of twelve cubits did compass either of them about. 16. And he made two chapiters of molten brass, to set upon the tops of the pillars; the height of the one chapter was five cubits, and the height of the other chapter was five cubits: 17. And nets of chequer-work, and wreaths of chain-work, for the chapiters which were upon the top of the pillars; seven for the one chapter, and seven

seven for the other chapter. 18. And he made the pillars, and two rows round about upon the one net-work, to cover the chapters that *were* upon the top, with pomegranates: and so did he for the other chapter. 19. And the chapters that *were* upon the top of the pillars, *were* of lily-work in the porch, four cubits. 20. And the chapters upon the two pillars *had pomegranates* also above, over against the belly which *was* by the net-work: and the pomegranates *were* two hundred, in rows round about upon the other chapter. 21. And he set up the pillars in the porch of the temple: and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin: and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz. 22. And upon the top of the pillars *was* lily-work: so was the work of the pillars finished. 23. ¶ And he made a molten sea, ten cubits from the one brim to the other: it *was* round all about, and his height *was* five cubits: and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about. 24. And under the brim of it round about *there were* knops compassing it, ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about: the *knops* were cast in two rows, when it was cast. 25. It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea *was set* above upon them, and all their hinder parts *were* inward. 26. And it *was* an hand-breadth thick, and the brim thereof was wrought like the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies: it contained two thousand baths. 27. ¶ And he made ten bases of bras; four cubits was the length of one base, and four cubits the breadth thereof, and three cubits the height of it. 28. And the work of the bases *was* on this manner: They had borders, and the borders *were* between the ledges: 29. And on the borders that *were* between the ledges, *were* lions, oxen, and cherubims: and upon the ledges *there was* a base above: and beneath the lions and oxen *were* certain additions made of thin work. 30. And every base had four brasen wheels, and plates of bras: and the four corners thereof had undersetters: under the laver *were* undersetters molten, at the side of every addition. 31. And the mouth of it within the chapter, and above, *was* a cubit: but the mouth thereof *was* round, *after* the work of the base, a cubit and an half: and also upon the mouth of it *were* gravings with their borders, four-square, not round. 32. And under the borders *were* four wheels: and the axle-trees of the wheels *were* joined to the base, and the height of a wheel *was* a cubit and half a cubit. 33. And the work of the wheels *was* like the work of a chariot-wheel: their axle-trees, and their naves, and their felloes, and their spokes *were* all molten. 34. And *there were* four undersetters to the four corners of one base: and the undersetters *were* of the very base it self. 35. And in the top of the base *was there* a round compass of half a cubit high: and on the top of the base, the ledges thereof, and the borders thereof *were* of the same. 36. For on the plates of the ledges thereof, and on the borders thereof, he graved cherubims, lions, and palm-trees, according to the proportion of every one, and additions round about. 37. After this manner he made the ten bases: all of them had one casting, one measure, and one size. 38. ¶ Then made he ten lavers of bras: one laver contained forty baths: and every laver was four cubits: and upon every one of the ten bases, one laver. 39. And he put five bases on the right side of the house, and five on the left side of the house: and he set the sea on the right side of the house eastward, over against the south. 40. ¶ And Hiram made the lavers, and the shovels, and the basons: so Hiram made an end of doing all the work that he made king Solomon for the house of the LORD. 41. The two pillars, and the two bowls of the chapters that *were* on the top of the two pillars: and the two net-works, to cover the two bowls of the chapters which *were* upon the top of the pillars: 42. And four hundred pomegranates for the two net-works, *even* two rows of pomegranates for one network, to cover the two bowls of the chapters that *were* upon the pillars: 43. And the ten bases, and ten lavers on the bases: 44. And one sea, and twelve oxen under the sea: 45. And the pots, and the shovels, and the basons: and all these vessels which Hiram made to king

Solomon, for the house of the LORD, *were* of bright bras. 46. In the plain of Jordan did the king cast them in the clay-ground, between Succoth and Zarthan. 47. And Solomon left all the vessels *unweighed*, because they were exceeding many: neither was the weight of the bras found out.

We have here an account of the bras work about the temple; there was no iron about the tabernacle, but we find David preparing for the temple *iron for things of iron*, 1 Chron. xxix. 2. What those things were, we are not told, but the things of bras are here some of them described, and the rest mentioned.

1. The Brasier whom Solomon employed to preside in this part of the work, was Hiram, or Hiram, 2 Chron. iv. 11. who was by his mother's side an Israelite, of the tribe of Naphtali, by his father's side a man of Tyre, ver. 14. If he had the ingenuity of a Tyrian, and the good affection of an Israelite to the house of God, (the head of a Tyrian, and the heart of an Israelite) it was happy that the blood of the two nations mixed in him, thereby he was qualified for the work to which he was designed; as the tabernacle was built with the wealth of Egypt, so the temple with the wit of Tyre; God will serve himself by the common gifts of the children of men.

2. The bras he made use of was the best he could get; all the brasen vessels were of bright bras, ver. 45. good bras, so the Chaldee, that which was strongest and looked finest; God, that is the best, must be served and honoured with the best.

3. The place where all the brasen vessels were cast, was in the plain of Jordan, because the ground there was stiff and clayey, fit to make moulds of, for the casting of the bras, ver. 46. and Solomon would not have that dirty smoky work done in or near Jerusalem.

4. The quantity was not accounted for, the vessels were unnumbered, (so it may be read, ver. 47. as well as unweighed) because they were exceeding many, and it would have been an endless thing to keep the count of them, neither was the weight of the bras, when it was delivered to the workmen, searched or enquired into, so honest were the workmen, and such great plenty of bras they had, that there was no danger of wanting; we must ascribe it to Solomon's care, that he provided so much, not to his carelessness, that he kept no account of it.

5. Some particulars of the bras-work are described.

1. Two brasen pillars, which were set up in the porch of the temple, ver. 21. whether under the cover of the porch, or in the open air, is not certain; it was between the temple and the court of the priests. These pillars were neither to hang gates upon, nor to rest any building upon, but purely for ornament and significancy. (1.) What an ornament they were, we may gather from the account here given of the curious work that was about them; checquer-work, and chain-work, and net-work, and lily-work, and pomegranates in rows, and all of bright bras; and framed, no doubt, according to the best rules of proportion, to please the eye. (2.) Their significancy is intimated in the names given them, ver. 21. *Jachin, He will establish*; and *Boaz, In him is strength*. Some think they were intended for memorials of the pillar of cloud and fire, which led Israel through the wilderness: I rather think them designed for memorandums to the priests, and others that came to worship at God's door, 1. To depend upon God only, and not upon any sufficiency of their own, for strength and establishment in all their religious exercises; when we come to wait upon God, and find our hearts wandring, and unfixed, then by faith let us fetch in help from heaven: Jachin, God will fix this roving mind; *It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace*. We find our selves weak, and unable for holy duties, but this is our encouragement. Boaz, in him is our strength, who works in us both to will and to do. *I will go in the strength of the Lord God*. Spiritual strength and stability are to be had at the door of God's temple, where we must wait for the gifts of grace, in the use of the means of grace. 2. It was a memorandum to them, of the strength and establishment of the temple of God among them. Let them keep close to God and duty, and they should never lose the dignities and privileges, but the grant should be confirmed, and perpetuated to them. The gospel church is what God will establish, what he will strengthen, and what the gates of hell can never prevail against: But for this temple, when it was destroyed, particular notice is taken of the destroying of these pillars, 2 Kings xxv. 13, 17. which had been the tokens of its establishment, and would have been so, if they had not forsaken God.

2. A brasen sea; a very large vessel, above five yards diameter, and which contained above five hundred barrels of water for the priests use in washing themselves, the sacrifices, and keeping the courts of the temple clean, ver. 23, &c. It stood raised upon the figures of twelve oxen in bras, so high, that either they must have stairs to climb up to it, or cocks at the bottom to draw water from it. The Gibeonites or Nethinim, who were to draw water for the house of God, had the care of filling it. Some think Solomon made the images of oxen to support this

this great cistern, in contempt of the golden calf, which Israel had worshipped, that (as bishop Patrick expresseth it) the people might see there was nothing worthy of adoration to those figures; they were fitter to make posts of, than to make gods of: Yet this prevailed not to prevent Jeroboam's setting up the calves for deities. In the court of the tabernacle, there was only a laver of brass provided to wash in, but in the court of the temple; a sea of brass; intimating, that by the gospel of Christ much fuller preparation is made for our cleansing, than was by the law of Moses; That had a laver, this a sea; a fountain opened, Zech. xiii. 1.

3. Ten bases, or stands, or settles of brass, on which were put ten lavers, to be filled with water for the service of the temple, because there would not be room at the molten sea for all that had occasion to wash there. The bases on which the lavers were fixed, are very largely described here, ver. 27, &c. They were curiously adorned, and set upon wheels, that the lavers might be removed as there was occasion; but ordinarily they stood in two rows, five on one side of the court, and five on the other, ver. 39. Each laver contained forty baths, i. e. about ten barrels, ver. 38. They must be very clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord: Spiritual priests, and spiritual sacrifices, must be washed in the laver of Christ's blood, and of regeneration. We must wash oft, for we daily contract pollution; cleanse our hands, and purify our hearts. Plentiful provision is made for our cleansing; so that if we have our lot for ever among the unclean, it will be our own fault.

4. Besides these, there was a vast number of brass pots, made to boil the flesh of the peace-offerings in, which the priests and offerers were to feast upon before the Lord, see 1 Sam. ii. 14. also shovels, wherewith they took out the ashes of the altar. Some think the word signifies flesh-hooks, with which they took meat out of the pot.—The basons also were made of brass, to receive the blood of the sacrifices. These are put for all the utensils of the brazen altar, Exod. xxxviii. 3. Now they were doing, they made abundance of them, that they might have a good stock of new ones by them, when those that were first in use wore out, and went to decay. Thus Solomon, having wherewithal, provided for posterity.

48. And Solomon made all the vessels that pertained unto the house of the LORD: the altar of gold, and the table of gold, whereupon the shew-bread was, 49. And the candlesticks of pure gold, five on the right side, and five on the left, before the oracle, with the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs of gold, 50. And the bowls, and the snuffers, and the basons, and the spoons, and the censers of pure gold; and the hinges of gold, both for the doors of the inner house, the most holy place, and for the doors of the house, to wit, of the temple. 51. So was ended all the work that king Solomon made for the house of the LORD: and Solomon brought in the things which David his father had dedicated; even the silver, and the gold, and the vessels did he put among the treasures of the house of the LORD.

Here is, 1. The making of the gold work of the temple, which, it seems, was done last, for with it the work of the house of God ended. All within doors was gold, and all made new, except the ark, with its mercy-seat and cherubims, the old ones either melted down, or laid by. The golden altar, table, and candlestick, with all their appurtenances. The altar of incense was still one, for Christ and his intercession is so: but he made ten golden tables, 2 Chron. iv. 8. (though here mention is made of that one only on which the shew-bread was, ver. 48. which we may suppose larger than the rest, and to which the rest were as side-boards) and ten golden candlesticks, ver. 49. intimating the much greater plenty both of spiritual food, and heavenly light, which the gospel blesteth us with, than the law of Moses did or could afford. — Even the hinges of the doors were of gold, ver. 50. that every thing might be alike magnificent, and speak Solomon's generosity. Some suggest, that every thing was made thus splendid in God's temple, to keep the people from idolatry, for none of the idol-temples were so rich and fine as this: But how little the expedient availed, the event shewed.

2. The bringing in of the dedicated things, which his father had devoted to the honour of God, ver. 51. What was not expended in the building and furniture, was laid up in the treasury for repairs, exigencies, and the constant charge of the temple service. What the parents have dedicated to God, the children ought by no means to alienate or recal, but cheerfully confirm what was intended for pious and charitable uses, that they may with their estates inherit the blessing.

C H A P. VIII.

The building and furniture of the temple were very glorious, but the dedication of it exceeds in glory, as much as prayer and praise, the work of saints, exceeds the casting of metal, and the graving of stones, the work of the craftsman. The temple was

designed for the keeping up of the correspondence between God and his people; and here we have an account of the solemnity of their first meeting there. 1. The representatives of all Israel were called together, ver. 1; 2. to keep a feast to the honour of God for fourteen days, ver. 65. 3. The priests brought the ark into the most holy place, and fixed it there, ver. 3—9. 4. God took possession of it by a cloud, ver. 10, 11. 5. Solomon, with thankful acknowledgments to God, informed the people touching the occasion of their meeting, ver. 12—21. 6. In a long prayer, he recommended to God's gracious acceptance all the prayers that should be made in or towards this place, ver. 22—53. 7. He dismissed the assembly with a blessing, and an exhortation, ver. 54—61. 8. He offered abundance of sacrifices, on which he and his people feasted, and so parted, with great satisfaction, ver. 62—66. These were Israel's golden days; days of the Son of man in type.

1. **T**HEN Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon, in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD, out of the city of David, which is Zion. 2. And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon, at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. 3. And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. 4. And they brought up the ark of the LORD, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, even those did the priests and the Levites bring up. 5. And king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled unto him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be told nor numbred for multitude. 6. And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, into the oracle of the house to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims. 7. For the cherubims spread forth their two wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark, and the staves thereof above. 8. And they drew out the staves, that the ends of the staves were seen out in the holy place before the oracle, and they were not seen without: and there they are unto this day. 9. There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. 10. And it came to pass when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, 11. So that the priests could not stand to minister, because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.

The temple, though richly beautified, yet while it was without the ark, was like a body without a soul, or a candlestick without a candle, or (to speak most properly) a house without an inhabitant: All the cost and pains bestowed on this stately structure is lost, if God do not accept it; and unless he please to own it, as the place where he will record his name, it is after all but a ruinous heap; when therefore all the work is ended, chap. vii. 51. the one thing needful is yet behind, and that is the bringing in of the ark: This therefore is the end which must crown the work, and which here we have an account of the doing of with great solemnity.

1. Solomon presides in this service, as David did in the bringing up of the ark to Jerusalem; and neither of them thought it below them to follow the ark, or to lead the people in their attendance on it. Solomon glories in the title of the preacher, Eccl. i. 1. and the master of assemblies, — xii. 11. This great assembly he summons, ver. 1. and he is the centre of, for to him they all assembled, ver. 2. at the feast in the seventh month, viz. The feast of tabernacles, which was appointed on the fifteenth day of that month, Lev. xxiii. 34. David, like a very good man, brings the ark to a convenient place, near him; Solomon, like a very great man, brings it to a magnificent place. As every man has received the gift, so let him minister; and let children proceed in God's service there, where their parents left off.

2. All Israel attends the service; their judges, and the chief of their tribes and families; all their officers civil and military; and (as they speak in the north) the heads of their clans: A convention of these might well be called an assembly of all Israel; these came together on this occasion, (1.) To do honour to Solomon, and to return him the thanks of the nation, for all the good offices he had done in kindness to them. (2.) To do honour to the ark, to pay their respect to it, and testify their universal joy and satisfaction in its settlement.—The advancement of the ark in external splendor, though it has oft proved too strong a temptation to its hypocritical followers; yet, because it may prove

prove an advantage to its true interests, is to be rejoiced in (with trembling) by all that wish well to it.—Publick mercies call for publick acknowledgments.—They that appeared before the Lord, did not appear empty, for they all sacrificed sheep and oxen innumerable, *ver. 5.* The people in Solomon's time were very rich, and very easy, and very merry, and therefore it was fit that on this occasion they should consecrate not only their mirth, but a part of their wealth to God, and his honour.

3. The priests do their part of the service. In the wilderness the Levites were to carry the ark, because then there were not priests enow to do it; but here, (it being the last time the ark was to be carried) the priests themselves did it, as they were ordered to do, when it surrounded Jericho. We are here told, 1. What was in the ark, nothing but the two tables of stone, *ver. 9.* a treasure far exceeding all the dedicated things both of David and Solomon. The pot of manna, and Aaron's rod, were by the ark, but not in it. 2. What was brought up with the ark, *ver. 4.* *The tabernacle of the congregation.* It is likely, both that which Moses set up in the wilderness, which was in Gibeon, and that which David pitched in Sion, both of them were brought to the temple, to which they did, as it were, surrender all their holiness, merging it in that of the temple; which must from henceforward be the place where God must be sought unto. Thus will all the church's holy things on earth, that are so much its joy and glory, be swallowed up in the perfection of holiness above. 3. Where it was fixed in its place, the place appointed for its rest, after all its wanderings, *ver. 6.* *In the oracle of the house,* whence they expected God to speak to them, even in the most holy place, which was made so by the presence of the ark, *under the wings of the great cherubim,* which Solomon set up, *chap. vi. 23.* signifying the special protection of angels which God's ordinances, and the assemblies of his people, are taken under.—The staves of the ark were drawn out, so as to be seen from under the wings of the cherubims, to direct the high priest to the mercy-seat, over the ark, when he went in once a year to sprinkle the blood there; so that still they continued of some use, though there was no longer occasion for them to carry it by.

4. God graciously owns what is done, and testifies his acceptance of it, *ver. 10, 11.* The priests might come into the most holy place, till God manifested his glory there, but from thenceforward, none might at their peril approach the ark but the high priest, on the day of atonement: Therefore it was not till the priests were come out of the oracle, that the *Shechinah* took possession of it, in a cloud, which filled not only the most holy place, but the temple, so that the priest which burnt incense at the golden altar, could not bear it. By this visible emanation of the divine glory, 1. God put an honour upon the ark, and owned it as a token of his presence. The glory of it had been long diminished and eclipsed by its frequent removes, the meanness of its lodging, and its being exposed too much to common view; but God will now shew it is as dear to him as ever, and he will have it looked upon with as much veneration, as it was when Moses first brought it into his tabernacle. 2. He testifies his acceptance of the building and furnishing of the temple, as good service done to his name, and his kingdom among men. 3. He struck an awe upon this great assembly; and by what they saw, confirmed their belief of what they read in the books of Moses, concerning the glory of God's appearances to their fathers, that hereby they might be kept close to the service of the God of Israel, and fortified against temptations to idolatry. 4. He shewed himself ready to hear the prayer Solomon was now about to make; and not only so, but took up his residence in this house, that all his praying people might there be encouraged to make their applications to him.—But the glory of God appeared in a cloud, a dark cloud, to signify, (1.) The darkness of that dispensation in comparison with the light of the gospel, by which, *with open face we behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord.* (2.) The darkness of our present state, in comparison with the vision of God, which will be the happiness of heaven, where the divine glory is unveiled. Now we can only say what he is not, but then we shall see him as he is.

12. ¶ Then spake Solomon, The LORD said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. 13. I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever. 14. And the king turned his face about, and blessed all the congregation of Israel: (and all the congregation of Israel stood) 15. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which spake with his mouth unto David my father, and hath with his hand fulfilled it, saying, 16. Since the day that I brought forth my people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build an house, that my name might be therein; but I chose David to be over my people Israel. 17. And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. 18. And the LORD said unto David

my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart: 19. Nevertheless, thou shalt not build the house, but thy son that shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house unto my name. 20. And the LORD hath performed his word that he spake, and I am risen up in the room of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. 21. And I have set there a place for the ark, wherein is the covenant of the LORD, which he made with our fathers, when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.

Here, 1. Solomon encourageth the priests, who came out of the temple from their ministration, much astonished at the dark cloud which overshadowed them: The disciples of Christ *feared when they entered into the cloud,* though it was a *bright cloud,* Luke ix. 34. so did the priests, when they found themselves wrapt in a thick cloud. To silence their fears, (1.) He minds them of that which they could not but know, that this was a token of God's presence; *ver. 12.* *The Lord said, he would dwell in the thick darkness.* It is so far from being a token of his displeasure, that it is an indication of his favour, for he had said, *I will appear in a cloud,* Lev. xvi. 2. Note, Nothing is more effectual to reconcile us to dark dispensations, than to consider what God hath said, and to compare his word and works together; as *Lev. x. 3.* *This is that which the Lord hath said.* God is light, 1 *Joh. i. 5.* and he dwells in light, 1 *Tim. vi. 16.* but he dwells with men *in the thick darkness,* makes that his pavilion, because they could not bear the dazzling brightness of his glory: *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself.* Thus our holy faith is exercised, and our holy fear increased; there where God dwells in light, faith is swallowed up in vision, and fear in love. (2.) He himself bids it welcome, as worthy of all acceptance; and since God by this cloud came down to take possession, he doth in a few words solemnly give him possession, *ver. 13.* *Surely I come, saith God, Amen, (saith Solomon) Even so, come, Lord: The house is thine own, entirely thine own, I have surely built it for thee, and furnished it for thee; it is for ever thine own, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever; it shall never be alienated or converted to any other use; the ark shall never be removed from it, never unsettled again. It is Solomon's joy, that God has taken possession; and it is his desire, that he would keep possession. Let not the priests therefore dread that in which Solomon so much triumphs.*

2. He instructs the people, and gives them a plain account concerning this house, which they now saw God take possession of.—He spoke briefly to the priests to satisfy them, a word to the wife; but *turned his face about,* *ver. 14.* from them to the congregation that stood in the outer court, and addressed himself to them largely.

1. He blessed them.—When they saw the dark cloud enter the temple, they blessed themselves, being astonished at it, and afraid, lest the thick darkness should be utter darkness to them; the amazing sight, such as they had never seen in their days, we may suppose, drove every man to his prayers; and the vainest minds were made serious by it: Solomon therefore set in with their prayers, and blessed them all; as one having authority, (for *the less is blessed of the better*) in God's name he spake peace to them, and a blessing; like that with which the angel blessed Gideon, when he was in a fright upon a like occasion, *Judg. vi. 22, 23.* *Peace be unto thee, fear not, thou shalt not die.* Solomon blessed them, *i. e.* he pacified them, and discharged them from the consternation they were in. To receive this blessing they all stood up, in token of reverence, and readiness to hear and accept it. It is a proper posture to be in when the blessing is pronounced.

2. He informed them concerning this house which he had built, and was now dedicating. He begins his account with a thankful acknowledgment of the good hand of his God upon him hitherto: *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,* *ver. 15.* What we have the pleasure of, God must have the praise of. He thus engaged the congregation to lift up their hearts in thanksgivings to God, which would help to still the tumult of spirit which probably they were in. Come, (saith he) let God's awful appearances not drive us from him, but draw us to him, *Let us bless the Lord God of Israel:* Thus Job, under a dark scene, *blessed the name of the Lord.* Solomon here blessed God, (1.) For his promise which he *spake with his mouth to David.* (2.) For the performance; that he had now *fulfilled it with his hand.* We have then the best sense of God's mercies, and most grateful both to our selves and to our God, when we run up those streams to the fountain of the covenant, and compare what God doth with what he has said.

Solomon is now making a solemn surrender or dedication of this house unto God, delivering it to God by his own act and deed. Now we know, grants and conveyances commonly begin with recitals of what has been before done, leading to what is now

now done : accordingly here is a recital of the special causes and considerations moving Solomon to build this house.

1. He recites the want of such a place. It was necessary this should be premised ; for according to the dispensation they were under, there must be one place, in which they could expect God to record his name : If therefore there were any other chosen, this would be a usurpation : But he shews, from what God himself had said, that there was no other, *ver. 16. I chose no city to build a house in for my name ; therefore there is occasion for the building of this.*

2. He recites David's purpose to build such a place. God chose the person first that should rule his people, (I chose David, *ver. 16.*) and then put it into his heart to build an house for God's name, *ver. 17.* It was not a project of his own, for the magnifying of himself, but his good father, of blessed memory, laid the first design of it, though he lived not to lay the first stone.

3. He recites God's promise concerning himself : God approved his father's purpose, *ver. 18. Thou didst well that it was in thine heart.* Note, Sincere intentions to do good, shall be graciously approved and accepted of God, though providence prevent our putting them in execution. *The desire of a man is his kindness.* See 2 Cor. viii. 12. God accepted David's good will, yet would not permit him to do the good work, but reserved the honour of it for his son, *ver. 19. He shall build the house to my name ;* so that what he had done, was not of his own head, nor for his own glory ; but the work it self was according to his father's design, and his doing it was according to God's designation.

4. He recites what he himself had done, and with what intention ; *I have built an house,* not for my own name, but for the name of the Lord God of Israel, *ver. 20.* and set there a place for the ark, *ver. 21.* Thus all the right, title, interest, claim and demand whatsoever, which he or his had or might have in or to this house, or any of its appurtenances, he resigns, surrenders, and gives up to God for ever : It is for his name, and his ark. In this, saith he, *the Lord hath performed his word that he spake.* Note, Whatever good we do, we must look upon it as the performance of God's promise to us, rather than the performance of our promises to him. The more we do for God, the more we are indebted to him ; for our sufficiency is of him, and not of our selves.

22. ¶ And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD, in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven : 23. And he said, LORD God of Israel, *there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepeth covenant and mercy with thy servants, that walk before thee with all their heart :* 24. Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him : thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day. 25. Therefore now, LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight, to sit on the throne of Israel ; so that thy children take heed to their way, that they walk before me, as thou hast walked before me : 26. And now, O God of Israel, let thy word, I pray thee, be verified, which thou spakest unto thy servant David my father. 27. But will God indeed dwell on the earth ? behold, the heaven, and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee, how much less this house that I have builded ? 28. Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee to day : 29. That thine eyes may be opened toward this house night and day, *even* toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there : that thou mayst hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make towards this place. 30. And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray towards this place : and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and when thou hearest, forgive. 31. ¶ If any man trespass against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to cause him to swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house : 32. Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head, and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness. 33. ¶ When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and shall turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee in this house : 34. Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel,

and bring them again unto the land, which thou gavest unto their fathers. 35. ¶ When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee ; if they pray towards this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them : 36. Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance. 37. ¶ If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, *or* if there be caterpillar ; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities, whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness *there be ;* 38. What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, *or* by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands towards this house : 39. Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest (for thou, *even* thou only knowest the hearts of all the children of men) 40. That they may fear thee all the days that they live, in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers. 41. Moreover, concerning a stranger that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country, for thy names sake ; 42. (For they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched out arm) when he shall come and pray towards this house : 43. Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for : that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have builded, is called by thy name. 44. ¶ If thy people go out to battle against their enemy, whithersoever thou shalt send them, and shall pray unto the LORD toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house that I have built for thy name : 45. Then hear thou in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause. 46. If they sin against thee (for *there is no* that man sinneth not) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near ; 47. Yet if they shall bethink themselves, in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness ; 48. And so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name : 49. Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling-place, and maintain their cause, 50. And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed against thee, and give them compassion before them who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them : 51. For they be thy people and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest forth out of Egypt, from the mids of the furnace of iron : 52. That thine eyes may be open unto the supplication of thy servant, and unto the supplication of thy people Israel, to hearken unto them in all that they call for unto thee. 53. For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, to be thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses thy servant, when thou broughtest our fathers out of Egypt, O LORD God.

Solomon having made a general surrender of this house to God, which God had signified his acceptance of, by taking possession, next follows Solomon's prayer ; in which he makes a more particular declaration of the uses of that surrender, with all humility and reverence, desiring that God would agree thereto : In short, it is his request that this temple might be deemed and taken not only for a house of sacrifice, no mention is made of that in all this prayer, that was taken for granted, but a *house of prayer for all people ;* and herein it was a type of the gospel-church, see *Isa. lvi. 7.* compared with *Matth. xxi. 13.* Therefore Solomon opened this house not only with an extraordinary sacrifice, but with an extraordinary prayer.

1. The person that prayed this prayer was great : Solomon did not appoint one of the priests to do it, or one of the prophets,

prophets, but did it himself, *in the presence of all the congregation of Israel*, ver. 22. (1.) It was well he was able to do it; a sign he had made a good improvement of the pious education which his parents gave him. With all his learning, it seems he learnt to pray well, and knew how to express himself to God in a suitable manner *pro re nata*, without a prescribed form. In the crowd of his philosophical transactions, his proverbs and songs, he did not forget his devotions. He was a gainer by prayer, Chap. iii. 11. and we may suppose gave himself much to it, so that he excelled, as we find here, in praying gifts. (2.) It was well he was willing to do it, and not shy of performing divine service before so great a congregation: he was far from thinking it any disparagement to him to be his own chaplain, and the mouth of the assembly to God; and shall any think themselves too great to do this office for their own families. Solomon in all his other glory, even on his ivory throne, looked not so great as he did now. Great men should thus support the reputation of religious exercises, and so honour God with their greatness. Solomon was herein a type of Christ, the great intercessor for all over whom he rules.

2. The posture in which he prayed, it was very reverent, and expressive of humility, seriousness, and fervency in prayer. He stood before the altar of the Lord; intimating, that he expected the success of his prayer in the virtue of that great sacrifice which should be offered up in the fulness of time; typified by the sacrifices offered at that altar.—But when he addressed himself to prayer, (1.) He kneeled down, as appears ver. 54. where he is said to rise from his knees, compare 2 Chron. vi. 13. Kneeling is the most proper posture for prayer, Eph. iii. 14. The greatest of men must not think it below them to kneel before the Lord their maker.—Mr. Herbert saith, “Kneeling never spoiled silk stockings.” (2.) He spread forth his hands towards heaven; and as it should seem by ver. 54. continued so to the end of the prayer, hereby expressing his desire towards, and expectations from God, as a Father in heaven.—He spread forth his hands as it were to offer up the prayer from an open enlarged heart, and to reach it thitherward; and to receive the mercy thence, with both arms, which he prayed for.—Such outward expressions of the fixedness and fervour of devotion, ought not to be despised or ridiculed.

3. The prayer it self was very long, and yet perhaps longer than it is here recorded. At the throne of grace we have liberty of speech, and should use our liberty.—It is not making long prayers, but making them for a pretence, that Christ condemns.

Now in this excellent prayer, Solomon doth as we should in every prayer:

1. He gives glory to God. This he begins with, as the most proper act of adoration. He addresseth himself to God as the Lord God of Israel, a God in covenant with them. And, (1.) He gives him the praise of what he is in general; the best of beings in himself; *there is no God like thee*, none of the powers in heaven or earth to be compared with thee: and the best of masters to his people, *who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants*; not only as good as thy word in keeping covenant, but better than thy word in keeping mercy, doing that for them which thou hast not given them an express promise of, provided they walk before thee with all their heart, are zealous for thee, with an eye to thee. (2.) He gives him thanks for what he had done in particular for his family, ver. 24. *Thou hast kept with thy servant David*, as with other thy servants, *that which thou promisedst him*. The promise was a great favour to him, his support and joy, and now performance is the crown of it: *Thou hast fulfilled it, as it is this day*. Fresh experiences of the truth of God's promises, call for enlarged praises.

2. He sues for grace and favour from God.

1. That God would perform, to him and his, the mercy which he had promised, ver. 25, 26. Observe how this comes in: He thankfully acknowledgeth the performance of the promise in part; hitherto God had been faithful to his word, *Thou hast kept with thy servant David that which thou promisedst him*; so far that his son fills his throne, and has built the intended temple; *therefore now keep with thy servant David that which thou hast further promised him*, and which yet remains to be fulfilled in its season. Note, The experiences we have had of God's performing his promises, should encourage us to depend upon them, put them in suit, and plead them with God: And those who expect farther mercies, must be thankful for former mercies. Hitherto God has helped, 2 Cor. i. 10. Solomon repeats the promise, ver. 25. *There shall not fail thee a man to sit on the throne*, not omitting the condition, *so that thy children take heed to their way*; for we cannot expect God's performance of the promise, but upon our performance of the condition: and then he humbly begs this entail, ver. 26. *Now, O God of Israel, let thy word be verified*. God's promises (as we have oft observed) must be both the guide of our desires, and the ground of our hopes and expectations in prayer.—David had prayed, 2 Sam. vii. 25. *Lord, do as thou hast said*. Note, Children should learn of their godly parents how to pray, and plead in prayer.

2. That God would have respect to this temple, which he had now taken possession of, and that his eyes might be continually open towards it, ver. 29. That he would graciously own it, and so put an honour, and holiness upon it. To this purpose

he promiseth, (1.) An humble admiration of God's gracious condescension, ver. 27. *But will God indeed dwell on the earth?* Can we imagine that a Being infinitely high, and holy, and happy, should stoop so low, as to let it be said of him, that he dwells upon the earth, and blesteth the worms of the earth with his presence? The earth that is corrupt, and overspread with sin! Cursed, and reserved to fire! *Lord, how is it?* (2.) An humble acknowledgment of the incapacity of the house he had built, though very capacious, to contain God. *The heaven of heavens* cannot do that, for no place can include him, who is present in all places; even this house is too little, too mean to be the resident of him that is infinite in being and glory. Note, When we have done the most we can for God, we must acknowledge the infinite distance and disproportion that is between us and him, between our services and his perfections.

This premised, he prays in general, (1.) That God would graciously hear and answer this prayer he was now praying, ver. 28. It was an humble prayer, *the prayer of thy servant*; an earnest prayer, such a prayer as is a cry; a prayer made in faith, before thee, as the Lord, and my God; *Lord, hearken to it; have respect to it*, not as the prayer of Israel's king, no man's dignity in the world, or titles of honour, will recommend him to God; but as the prayer of thy servant. (2.) That God would in like manner hear and answer all the prayers that should at any time hereafter be made in or towards this house which he had now built, and of which God had said, *My name shall be there*, ver. 29. His own prayers; *Hearken to the prayers which thy servant shall make*; and the prayers of all Israel, and of every particular Israelite, ver. 30. *Hear it in heaven*, that is indeed *thy dwelling-place*, of which this is but a figure; and *when thou hearest, forgive the sin that separates between them and God, even the iniquity of the holy things*. (1.) He supposeth that God's people would ever be a praying people; he resolves to adhere to that duty himself. (2.) He directs them to have an eye to that place in their prayers where God was pleased to manifest his glory, so as he did not any where else on earth. None but priests might come into that place; but when they worshipped in the courts of the temple, it must be with an eye towards it; not as the object of their worship, that were idolatry; but as an instituted medium of their worship, helping the weakness of their faith, and typifying the mediation of Jesus Christ, who is the true temple, to whom we must have an eye in every thing wherein we have to do with God. They that were at a distance looked towards Jerusalem, for the sake of the temple, even when it was in ruins, Dan. vi. 10. (3.) He begs that God would hear the prayers and forgive the sins of all that look this way in their prayers; not as if he thought all the devout prayers offered up to God by those who had no knowledge of this house, or regard to it, were therefore rejected; but he desired that the sensible tokens of the divine presence with which this house was blessed, might always give sensible encouragement and comfort to believing petitioners.

More particularly, he here put divers cases in which he supposed application would be made to God by prayer, in or towards this house of prayer.

1. If God were appealed to by an oath for the determining of any controverted right between man and man, and the oath were taken before this altar, he prayed that God would some way or other discover the truth, and judge between the contending parties, ver. 31, 32. He prays that in difficult matters, this throne of grace might be a throne of judgment, from which God would right the injured that believably appealed to it; and punish the injurious that presumptuously appealed to it. It was usual to swear by the temple and altar, Matth. xxiii. 16, 18. Which corruption perhaps took rise from this supposition of an oath taken not by the temple or altar, but at or near them, for the greater solemnity.

2. If the people of Israel were groaning under any national calamity, or any particular Israelite under any personal calamity, he desires that the prayers they should make in or towards this house, might be heard and answered. (1.) In case of publick judgments, war, ver. 33. want of rain, ver. 35. famine or pestilence, ver. 37. and he ends with an &c. any plague or sickness; for there is no calamity befalls other people, but it may light on God's Israel. Now he supposeth, (1.) That the cause of the judgment would be sin, and nothing else: If they be smitten before the enemy, if there be no rain, it is *because they have sinned against thee*: That is it that makes all the mischief. (2.) That the consequent of the judgment would be, that they would cry to God, and make supplication to him in or towards that house. Those that slighted him before, would solicit him then: *Lord, in trouble have they visited thee: In their afflictions they will seek me early*, and earnestly. (3.) That the condition of the removal of the judgment was something more than bare praying for it. He could not, he would not ask that their prayer might be answered, unless they did also turn from their sin, ver. 35. and turn again to God, ver. 34. i. e. unless they did truly repent and reform: On no other terms may we look for salvation in this world or the other.—But in case they did thus qualify themselves for mercy, he prays, (1.) That God would hear from heaven, his holy temple above, to which they must look, through this temple. (2.) That he would forgive their sin, for judgments are then only removed in

mercy, when sin is pardoned. (3.) That he would *teach them the good way wherein they should walk*, by his Spirit, with his word and prophets; and thus they might be both profited by their trouble, (for *blessed is the man whom God chastens and teaches*) and prepared for deliverance; which then comes in love, when it finds us brought back to the good way of God and duty. (4.) That he would then remove the judgment, and redress the grievance, whatever it is; not only accept the prayer, but give in the mercy prayed for.

(2.) In case of personal afflictions, *ver. 38, 39, 40*. If any man of Israel has an errand to thee, here let him find thee, here let him find favour with thee. He doth not instance in particulars; so numerous, so various are the grievances of the children of men: (1.) He supposeth that the complainants themselves would very sensibly feel from their own burthen, and would open that case to God, which otherwise they kept to themselves, and did not make any man acquainted with. *They shall know every man the plague of his own heart*, what it is that pains him, and, as we say, where the shoe pinches; and shall spread their hands, *i. e.* spread their case, as Hezekiah spread the letter in prayer, towards this house, whether the trouble be of body or mind, they shall represent it before God. Inward burthens seem especially meant; sin is the plague of our own heart, our indwelling corruptions are our spiritual diseases; every Israelite indeed endeavours to know these, that he may mortify them, and watch against the risings of them. These he complains of, this is the burthen he groans under: *O wretched man that I am!* These drive him to his knees, drive him to the sanctuary, lamenting these, *he spreads forth his hands* in prayer. (2.) He refers all cases of this kind that should be brought hither to God. (1.) To his omniscience; *Thou, even thou only knowest the hearts of all the children of men*, not only the plagues of their hearts, their several wants and burthens, (these he knows, but he will know them from us) but the desire and intent of the heart; the sincerity or hypocrisy of it: *Thou knowest which prayer comes from the heart, and which from the lips only*. The hearts of kings are not unsearchable to God. (2.) To his justice; *Give to every man according to his ways*, and he will not fail to do so, by the rules of grace, not the law, for then we were all undone. (3.) To his mercy; hear, and forgive, and do, *ver. 39. that they may fear thee all their days*, *ver. 40*. This use we should make of the mercy of God to us in hearing our prayers, and forgiving our sins, we should thereby be engaged to fear him while we live: *Fear the Lord and his goodness; there is forgiveness with him that he may be feared*.

(3.) The case of the stranger that is not an Israelite is next mentioned, a proselyte that comes to the temple to pray to the God of Israel, being convinced of the folly and wickedness of worshipping the gods of his country. (1.) He supposeth there would be many such, *ver. 41, 42*. that the fame of God's great works which he had wrought for Israel, by which he proved himself to be above all gods, nay, to be God alone, would reach to distant countries; they that live remote *shall hear of thy strong hand, and thy stretched-out arm*; and this will bring all thinking considerate people to pray towards this house, that they may obtain the favour of a God that is able to do them a real kindness. (2.) He begs that God would accept and answer the proselyte's prayer, *ver. 43. Do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for*. Thus early, thus ancient were the indications of favour towards the *sinners of the Gentiles*: as there was then *one law for the native and for the stranger*, *Exod. xii. 49*. so there was one gospel for both. (3.) Herein he aims at the glory of God, and the propagating of the knowledge of him. —O let the stranger in a special manner speed well in his address, that he may carry away with him to his own country, a good report of the God of Israel, *that all people may know thee, and fear thee*, (and if they know thee aright, they will fear thee) *as do thy people Israel*. So far is Solomon from monopolizing the knowledge and service of God, and wishing to have them confined to Israel only, (which was the envious desire of the Jews in the days of Christ and his apostles) that he prays, that *all people might fear God as Israel did*. Would to God that all the children of men might receive the adoption, and be made God's children. *Father, thus glorify thy name*.

4. The case of an army going forth to battle is next recommended by Solomon to the divine favour. It is supposed that the army is encamped at a distance, somewhere a great way off, sent by divine orders *against the enemy*, *ver. 44*. when they are ready to engage, and consider the perils and doubtful issues of battle, and put up a prayer to God for protection and success, with their eye *towards this city and temple*, then *hear their prayer*, encourage their hearts, strengthen their hands, cover their heads, and so maintain their cause, and give them victory.—Soldiers in the field must not think it enough that they who tarry at home pray for them, but must pray for themselves, and they are here encouraged to hope for a gracious answer. Praying should always go along with fighting.

5. The case of poor captives is the last that is here instanced in, as a proper object of divine compassion. 1. He supposeth that Israel would sin. He knew them, and himself, and the nature of man too well to think this a foreign supposition, *for there is no*

man that sinneth not, that doth not enough to justify God in the severest rebukes of his providence: No man but what is in danger of falling into gross sin, and will, if God leave him to himself. 2. He supposeth what may well be expected, if Israel revolt from God, that God will be *angry with them*, and *deliver them into the hand of their enemies*, to be carried captive into a strange country, *ver. 46*. 3. He then supposeth that they will bethink themselves, will consider their ways; for afflictions put men upon considerations; and when once they are brought to consider, they will repent and pray, will confess their sins, and humble themselves, saying, *we have sinned, and have done perversely*, *ver. 47*. and *will return to God in the land of their enemies*, whom they had forsaken in their own land. 4. He supposeth that in their prayers they will look towards their own land, the holy land, Jerusalem the holy city, and the temple the holy house, and directs them so to do, *ver. 48*. for his sake who gave them that land, chose that city, and to whose honour that house was built. 5. He prays that then God would *hear their prayers, forgive their sins, plead their cause*, and incline their enemies to *have compassion on them*, *ver. 49, 50*. God hath all hearts in his hand, and can when he pleaseth, turn the strongest stream the contrary way, and make those to pity his people who have been their most cruel persecutors. See this prayer answered, *Psal. cvi. 46*. *He made them to be pitied of those that carried them captive*, which if it did not enlarge, yet eased their captivity. 6. He pleads their relation to God, and his interest in them; they are thy people which thou hast taken into thy covenant, and under thy care and conduct, thine inheritance, from which, more than from any other nation, thy rent and tribute of glory issues and arises, *ver. 51. separated from among all people to be so*, and by distinguishing favours appropriated to thee, *ver. 53*.

Lastly, After all these particulars he concludes with this general request, that God would hearken to all his praying people in *all that they call unto him for*, *ver. 52*. No place now under the gospel can be imagined to add any acceptableness to the prayers made in or towards it, as the temple then did, that was a shadow, the substance is Christ, whatever we ask in his name it shall be given us.

54. And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all his prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees, with his hands spread up to heaven. 55. And he stood and blessed all the congregation of Israel, with a loud voice, saying, 56. Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant. 57. The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us: 58. That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers. 59. And let these my words wherewith I have made supplication before the LORD, be nigh unto the LORD our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: 60. That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God, and that there is none else. 61. Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day.

Solomon, after his sermon in Ecclesiastes, gives us the conclusion of the whole matter; so he doth here after this long prayer; it is called his *blessing of the people*, *ver. 55*. he pronounced it standing, that he might be the better heard, and because he blessed as one having authority; never were words more fitly spoken, nor more pertinently, never was congregation dismissed with that, which was more likely to affect them, and abide with them.

1. He gives to God the glory of the great and kind things he had done for Israel, *ver. 56*. he stood up to *bless the congregation*, *ver. 55*. but begins with blessing God, for we must in *every thing give thanks*; do we expect God should do well for us and ours, let us take all occasions to speak well of him and his.—He blesteth God who has given, he doth not say wealth; and honour, and power, and victory to Israel, but rest, as if that were a blessing more valuable than any of those; let not those who have rest, undervalue that blessing then, though they want the other.—He compares the blessings God had bestowed upon them, with the promises he had given them, that God might have the honour of his faithfulness, and the truth of that word of his, which he has *magnified above all his name*. (1.) He refers to the *promises given by the hand of Moses*, as he did, *ver. 15, 24*. to those which were made to David; there were promi-

ses given by Moses, as well as precepts; it was long ere God gave Israel the promised rest, but they had it at last, after many toils; the day will come, when God's spiritual Israel will rest from all their labours. (2.) He doth, as it were, write a receipt in full on the back of these bonds, *there has not failed one word of all his good promise*; this discharge he gives in the name of all Israel, to the everlasting honour of the divine faithfulness, and the everlasting encouragement of all those that build upon the divine promises.

2. He blesteth himself and the congregation, expressing his earnest desire and hope of these four things. 1. The presence of God with them, that is all in all to the happiness of a church and nation, and of every particular person. This great congregation was now shortly to scatter, and it was not likely they should ever be all together again in this world, Solomon therefore dismissed them with this blessing, *The Lord be present with us*, and that will be comfort enough, when we are absent the one from the other; *The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers*, ver. 57. *let him not leave us*, let him be to us to day, and to ours for ever, what he was to those that went before us. 2. The power of his grace upon them, *let him be with us*, and continue with us, not that he may enlarge our coats, and increase our wealth, but *that he may incline our hearts to himself, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments*, ver. 58. Spiritual blessings are the best blessings, which we should covet earnestly to be blessed with; our hearts are naturally averse to our duty, and apt to decline from God, it is his grace that inclines them, Grace that must be obtained by prayer. (3.) An answer to the prayer he had now made, *Let these my words be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night*, ver. 59. Let a gracious return be made to every prayer that shall be made here, and that will be a continual answer to this prayer.—What Solomon asks here for his prayer, is still granted in the intercession of Christ, which his supplication was a type of, that powerful prevailing intercession, *is before the Lord our God day and night*; for our great advocate attends continually to this very thing, and we may depend upon him to maintain our cause (against the adversary, that accuseth us *day and night*, Rev. xii. 10.) *and the common cause of his people Israel, at all times*, upon all occasions, as the matter shall require, so as to speak for us *the word of the day in its day*, as the original here reads it, from which we shall receive grace sufficient, suitable and seasonable, *in every time of need*. (4.) The glorifying of God in the enlargement of his kingdom among men. Let Israel be thus blessed, thus favoured; not that all people may become tributaries to us, Solomon sees his kingdom as great as he desires, but *that all people may know that the Lord is God, and he only*, and may come and worship him, ver. 60. With this Solomon's prayers, like the prayers of his father David the son of Jesse, are ended, Psal. lxxii. 19, 20. *let the whole earth be filled with his Glory*; we cannot close our prayers with a better summary than this, *Father, glorify thy name*.

3. He solemnly charges his people to continue and persevere in their duty to God; having spoken to God for them, he here speaks from God to them, and those only would fare the better for his prayers that were made better by his praying; his admonition at parting is, *Let your heart be perfect with the Lord our God*, ver. 61. let your obedience be universal without dividing, upright without dissembling, and constant without declining; this is evangelical perfection.

62. ¶ And the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the LORD. 63. And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace-offerings, which he offered unto the LORD, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep: so the king and all the children of Israel, dedicated the house of the LORD. 64. The same day did the king hallow the middle of the court that was before the house of the LORD: for there he offered burnt-offerings, and meat-offerings, and the fat of the peace-offerings: because the brazen altar that was before the LORD, was too little to receive the burnt-offerings, and meat-offerings, and the fat of the peace-offerings. 65. And at that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath, unto the river of Egypt, before the LORD our God, seven days and seven days, *even* fourteen days. 66. On the eighth day he sent the people away: and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyfully and glad of heart, for all the goodness that the LORD had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people.

We read before that Judah and Israel were eating and drinking, and very merry under their own vines and fig-trees, here we have them so in God's courts; now they found Solomon's words true concerning wisdom's ways, that they are ways of pleasantness.

1. They had a great deal of joy and satisfaction while they attended at God's house, for there, (1.) Solomon offered a great sacrifice, twenty two thousand oxen, and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep, enough to have drained the country of cattle if it had not been a very fruitful land. The heathen thought themselves very generous when they offered sacrifices by the hundreds, hecatombs they called them, but Solomon out-did them, he offered them by thousands. When Moses dedicated his altar, the peace-offerings were twenty four *bullocks; rams, goats and lambs*, one hundred and eighty, Numb. vii. 88. then the people were poor, but now they were increased in wealth more was expected from them; where God sows plentifully he must reap accordingly. All these sacrifices could not be offered in one day, but in the several days of the feast; thirty oxen a day served Solomon's table, but thousands shall go to God's altar; few are thus minded, to spend more on their souls than on their bodies. The flesh of the peace-offerings, which belonged to the officer, it is likely, Solomon treated the people with; Christ fed those who attended him.—The brazen altar was not big enough to receive all these sacrifices, so that to serve the present occasion they were forced to offer many of them *in the middle of the court*, ver. 64. Some think on altars, altars of earth or stone erected for the purpose, and taken down when the solemnity was over, others think on the bare ground; they that will be generous in serving God, need not stint themselves for want of room and occasion to be so. (2.) He kept a feast, the feast of tabernacles, as it should seem, after the feast of dedication, and both together lasted fourteen days, ver. 65. yet they said not, *Behold, what a weariness is it?*

2. They carried this joy and satisfaction with them to their own houses. When they were dismissed they blessed the king, ver. 66. applauded him, admired him, and returned him the thanks of the congregation, and then *went to their tents joyful and glad of heart*, all easy and pleased; God's goodness was the matter of their joy, so it should be of ours at all times; they rejoiced in God's blessing both on the royal family and on the kingdom; thus should we go home rejoicing from holy ordinances, and go on our way rejoicing, for God's goodness to our Lord Jesus, of whom David his servant was a type in the advancement and establishment of his throne, pursuant to the covenant of redemption; and to all believers, his spiritual Israel, in their sanctification and consolation, pursuant to the covenant of grace; if we rejoice not herein alway, it is our own fault.

C H A P. IX.

In this chapter we have, (1.) *The answer which God in a vision gave to Solomon's prayer, and the terms he settled with him*, ver. 1—9. (2.) *The interchanging of grateful kindnesses between Solomon and Hiram*, ver. 10—14. (3.) *His workmen and buildings*, ver. 15—24. (4.) *His devotion*, ver. 25. (5.) *His trading navy*, ver. 26—28.

1. **A**ND it came to pass when Solomon had finished the building of the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all Solomons desire which he was pleased to do, 2. That the LORD appeared to Solomon the second time, as he had appeared unto him at Gibeon. 3. And the LORD said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever, and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually. 4. And if thou wilt walk before me as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, *and* wilt keep my statutes and my judgments: 5. Then will I establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever: as I promised to David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel. 6. *But* if you shall at all turn from following me, you or your children, and will not keep my commandments, *and* my statutes, which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them: 7. Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and Israel shall be a proverb, and a by-word among all people: 8. And at this house *which* is high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and to this house? 9. And they shall answer, Because they forsook the LORD their God, who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath the LORD brought upon them all this evil.

God had given a real answer to Solomon's prayer, and tokens of his acceptance of it immediately, by the fire from heaven which consumed the sacrifices, as we find 2 Chron. vii. 1. but here we have a more express and distinct answer to it. Observe,

1. In what way God gave him this answer, he appeared to him, as he had done at Gibeon, in the beginning of his reign, in a dream or vision, ver. 2. the comparing of it with that intimates that it was the very night after he had finished the solemnities of his festival, for so that was, 2 Chron. i. 6, 7. And then, ver. 1. speaking of Solomon's finishing all his buildings, which was not till many years after the dedication of the temple, must be read, thus *Solomon finished*, as it is 2 Chron. vii. 11. and ver. 2. must be read, *and the Lord had appeared*.

2. The purport of this answer.

1. He assures him of his special presence in the temple he had built, in answer to the prayer he had made, ver. 3. *I have hallowed this house*; Solomon had dedicated it, but it was God's prerogative to hallow it, to sanctify or consecrate it; man cannot make a place holy, yet what we in sincerity devote to God, we may hope he will graciously accept of as his; and *his eyes and his heart shall be upon it*. Apply it to persons, the living temples; those whom God hallows or sanctifies, whom he sets apart for himself, they have his eye, they have his heart, his love and care, and this perpetually.

2. He shews him that he and his people were for the future upon their good behaviour, let them not be secure now, as if they might live as they list now they had the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord among them, Jer. vii. 4. No, this house was designed to protect them in their allegiance to God, but not in their rebellion or disobedience; God deals plainly with us, sets before us good and evil, the blessing and the curse, and lets us know what we must trust to. God here tells Solomon,

1. That the establishment of his kingdom depended upon the constancy of his obedience, ver. 4, 5. *If thou wilt walk before me as David did*, who left thee a good example, and encouragement enough to follow it, an advantage thou wilt be accountable for if thou do not improve it, *if thou wilt walk as he did in integrity of heart and uprightness*, for that is the main matter, no religion but sincerity, *then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom*, and not otherwise, for on that condition the promise was made, Psal. cxxxii. 12. If we perform our part of the covenant, God will not fail to perform his; if we improve the grace God has given us, he will confirm us to the end. Let not the children of godly parents expect the entail of the blessing, unless they tread in the steps of those that are gone before them to heaven, and keep up the virtue and piety of their ancestors.

2. That the ruin of his kingdom would be the certain consequence of his or his childrens apostasy from God, ver. 6. But know then, and let thy family and kingdom know it, and be admonished by it, that *if you shall altogether turn from following me*, (so it is thought it should be read) if you forsake my service, desert mine altar, and go and serve other gods, (for that was the covenant-breaking sin) if you or your children break off from me, this house will not save you. But, (1.) Israel, though a holy nation, will be cut off, ver. 7. by one judgment after another, till they become a proverb and a by-word, and the most despicable people under the sun, though now the most honourable; this supposeth the destruction of the royal family, though it is not particularly threatned; the king is of course undone, if the kingdom be. (2.) The temple, though a holy house, which God himself had hallowed for his name, should be abandoned, and laid desolate,—ver. 8, 9. *This house which is high*—they prided themselves in the stateliness and magnificence of the structure, but let them know it was not so high as to be out of the reach of God's judgments, if they vilified it so as to exchange it for groves and idol temples, and yet at the same time magnified it so as to think it secured the favour of God to them, though they never so much corrupted themselves. *This house which is high*; they that now pass by it are astonished at the bulk and beauty of it, the richness, contrivance and workmanship are admired by all spectators, and it is called a stupendous fabrick; but if you forsake God, its height will make its fall the more amazing, and they that pass by will be as much astonished at its ruins, and the guilty, self-convicted, self-condemned Israelites, will be forced to acknowledge with shame, that they themselves were the ruin of it; for when shall it be asked, *Why hath the Lord done thus to this house?* They cannot but answer, it was *because they forsook the Lord their God*. See Deut. xxix. 24. Their sin will be read in their punishment, they deserted the temple, and therefore God deserted it; they profaned it with their sins, and laid it common, and therefore God profaned it with his judgments, and laid it waste.—This God gave Solomon fair warnings of, now he had newly built and dedicated it, that he and his people might not be high-minded, but fear.

10. ¶ And it came to pass at the end of twenty years, when Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the LORD, and the kings house, 11. (Now Hiram the king of Tyre had furnished Solomon with cedar trees, and fir-trees, and with gold, according to all his desire)

that then king Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee. 12. And Hiram came out from Tyre to see the cities which Solomon had given him, and they pleased him not. 13. And he said, What cities are these which thou hast given me, my brother? And he called them the land of Cabul unto this day. 14. And Hiram sent to the king sixscore talents of gold.

What agreement was made between Solomon and Hiram when the building-work was to be begun we read before, chap. v. here we have an account of their fair and friendly parting when the work was done.

1. Hiram made good his bargain to the utmost, he had furnished Solomon with materials for his buildings according to all his desire, ver. 11. and with gold, ver. 14.—So far was he from envying Solomon's growing greatness and reputation, and being jealous of him, that he helped to magnify him; Solomon's power with Solomon's wisdom need not be dreaded by any of his neighbours; God honours him, therefore Hiram will.

2. Solomon, no doubt, made good his bargain, and gave Hiram food for his household, as was agreed, chap. v. 9. But here we are told that over and above that he gave him twenty cities, (small ones we may suppose, like those mentioned here, ver. 19.) in the land of Galilee, ver. 11. It should seem these were not allotted to any of the tribes of Israel, (for the border of Asher came up to them, Josh. xix. 27. which intimates that it did not include them) but continued in the hands of the natives till Solomon made himself master of them, and then made a present of them to Hiram; it becomes those that are great and good to be generous.—Hiram came to see these cities, and did not like them, ver. 12. *they pleased him not*.—He called the country the land of Cabul, a Phenician word (saith Josephus) which signifies displeasing, ver. 13. he therefore returned them back to Solomon, as we find 2 Chron. viii. 2. who repaired them, and then *caused the children of Israel to inhabit them*, which intimates that before they did not; but when Solomon received back what he had given, no doubt he honourably gave Hiram an equivalent in something else. But what shall we think of this? Was Solomon paltry and sneaking, to give Hiram what was not worth his acceptance? Or was Hiram humourfome, and hard to please? I am willing to believe it was neither so nor so, the country was truly valuable, and the cities in it, but not agreeable to Hiram's genius; the Tyrians were merchants, trading men, that lived in fine houses, and went rich by navigation, but knew not how to value a country that was fit for corn and pasture, that was business that lay out of their way, and therefore Hiram desired Solomon to take them again, he knew not what to do with them, and if he would please to gratify him let it be in his own element, by coming in with him partner in trade, as we find he did, ver. 27. Hiram that was used to the clean streets of Tyre, could by no means agree with the dirty lanes in the land of Cabul, whereas the best lands have commonly the worst roads through them; see how the providence of God suits both the accommodations of this earth to the various dispositions of men, and the dispositions of men to the various accommodations of the earth, and all for the good of mankind in general; some take delight in husbandry, and wonder what pleasure sailors can take on a rough sea; others take as much delight in navigation, and wonder what pleasure husbandmen can take in a dirty country, like the land of Cabul; it is so in many other instances, in which we may observe the wisdom of him whose all souls are, and all lands.

15. ¶ And this is the reason of the levy, which king Solomon raised, for to build the house of the LORD, and his own house, and Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Gezer. 16. For Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up, and taken Gezer, and burnt it with fire, and slain the Canaanites that dwelt in the city, and given it for a present unto his daughter, Solomons wife. 17. And Solomon built Gezer, and Beth-horon the nether, 18. And Baalath, and Tadmor in the wilderness, in the land, 19. And all the cities of store that Solomon had, and cities for his chariots, and cities for his horsemen, and that which Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion. 20. And all the people that were left of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, which were not of the children of Israel, 21. Their children that were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy, upon those did Solomon levy a tribute of bond-service unto this day. 22. But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no bond-men: but they were men of war, and his servants, and his princes, and his captains, and rulers of his chariots, and his horsemen. 23. These were the chief of the officers that were over Solomons work, five hundred and fifty, which bare rule over the people that wrought in

in the work. 24. ¶ But Pharaoh's daughter came up out of the city of David, unto her house which Solomon had built for her: then did he build Millo. 25. ¶ And three times in a year did Solomon offer burnt-offerings, and peace-offerings, upon the altar which he built unto the LORD, and he burnt incense upon the altar that was before the LORD: so he finished the house. 26. ¶ And king Solomon made a navy of ships in Ezion-geber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red sea, in the land of Edom. 27. And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. 28. And they came to Ophir, and fet from thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to king Solomon.

We have here a further account of Solomon's greatness:

1. His buildings. He raised a great levy both of men and money, because he projected a great deal of building, which would both employ many hands, and put him to a vast expence, ver. 15. And he was a wise builder, who sat down first, and counted the cost, and would not begin to build till he found himself able to finish. Perhaps, there was some complaint of the heaviness of the taxes, which the historian excuseth from the greatness of his undertakings; he raised it not for war, as other princes, which would spend the blood of his subjects, but for building, which would require only their labour and purses. Perhaps David observed Solomon's genius to lie towards building, and foresaw he would have his head and hands full of it, when he penned that song of degrees for Solomon, which begins, *Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it*, Psal. cxxvii. 1. directing him to acknowledge God in all these ways, and by prayer and faith in his providence to take him along with him in all his designs of this kind. And Solomon verily began his work at the right end, for he built God's house first, and finished that before he began his own, and then God blessed him, and he prospered in all his other buildings; if we begin with God, he will go on with us; let the first-fruits be his, and the after fruits will the more comfortably be ours, *Matt. vi. 33*. Solomon built a church first, and then he was enabled to build houses, and cities, and walls, and what not? Those consult not their own interest, that defer to the last what they design for pious uses.

The further order in Solomon's buildings is observable, God's house first for religion, then his own for his own convenience, then a house for his wife, to which she removed as soon as it was ready for her, ver. 24. then Millo, the town-house, or Guildhall, then the wall of Jerusalem, the royal city, then some cities of note and strength in the country, which were decayed and unfortified, Hazor, Megiddo, &c. rebuilding these at his own charge, the inhabitants would be not only his subjects, but his tenants, which would increase the revenues of the crown for the benefit of his successors; among the rest he built Gezar, which Pharaoh took out of the hands of the Canaanites, and made a present of to his daughter, Solomon's wife, ver. 16. See how God maketh the earth to help the woman; Solomon was not himself a warlike prince, but the king of Egypt that was, took cities for him to build; then he built cities for convenience, for store, for his chariots, and for his horsemen, ver. 19. And lastly, he built for pleasure in Lebanon, for his hunting perhaps, or other diversions there; let piety begin, and profit proceed, and leave pleasure to the last.

2. His workmen and servants. In doing such great works, he must needs employ abundance of workmen. The honour of great men is borrowed from their inferiors, who do that which they have the credit of.

(1.) Solomon employed those which remained of the conquered and devoted nations in all the slavish work, ver. 20, 21. We may suppose they renounced their idolatry, and submitted to Solomon's government, so that he could not in honour utterly destroy them, and they were so poor, that he could not levy money on them, therefore he served himself of their labour. Herein he observed God's law, *Lev. xxv. 44*. *Thy bondmen shall be of the heathen*; and fulfilled Noah's curse upon Canaan, *A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren*, Gen. ix. 25.

(2.) He employed Israelites in the more creditable services, ver. 22, 23. *Of them he made no bondmen*, for they were God's freemen, but he made them soldiers and courtiers, and gave them offices, as he saw them qualified, among his chariots and horsemen, appointing some to support the service of the inferior labourers. Thus he preserved the dignity and liberty of Israel, and honoured their relation to God as a kingdom of priests.

3. His piety and devotion, ver. 25. *Three times in a year* he offered burnt-offerings extraordinary, viz. at the three yearly feasts, the passover, pentecost, and feast of tabernacles, in honour of the divine institution; besides what he offered at other times, both statedly, and upon special occasions. With his sacrifices he burnt incense, not himself, that was king Uzziah's crime, but the priest for him, at his charge, and to his particular use and behoof. It is said, he offered *on the altar which he himself built*. He took care to build it, and then, (1.) He himself made use of

No. 25.

it. Many will assist others devotions, that neglect their own. Solomon did not think his building an altar would excuse him from sacrificing, but rather engage him the more to it. (2.) He himself had the benefit and comfort of it. Whatever pains we take for the support of religion, to the glory of God, and the edification of others, we our selves are likely to have the advantage of it.

4. His merchandize. He built a fleet of trading ships, at Ezion-geber, ver. 26. a port on the coast of the Red sea, the farthest stage of the Israelites, when they wandered in the wilderness, *Numb. xxxii. 35*. It is probable, that wilderness now began to be peopled by the Edomites, which it was not then: To them this port had belonged, but David having subdued the Edomites, it now pertained to the crown of Judah. The fleet traded to Ophir, in the East Indies; supposed to be that which is now called Ceylon. Gold was the commodity traded for; substantial wealth. It should seem Solomon had before gone partner with Hiram, or put a venture into his ships, which made him a rich return of one hundred and twenty talents, ver. 14. that encouraged him to build a fleet of his own. The success of others in any employment, should quicken our industry; for *in all labour there is profit*. Solomon sent his own servants for factors, and merchants, and super-cargo's, but hired Tyrians for sailors, for they had *knowledge of the sea*, ver. 27. Thus one nation needs another, providence so ordering it, that there may be mutual commerce and assistance; for not only as christians, but as men, we are members one of another. The fleet brought home to Solomon *four hundred and twenty talents of gold*, ver. 28. Canaan, the holy land, the glory of all lands, had no gold in it, which teaches us, that that part of the wealth of this world, which is for hoarding and trading, is not the best part of it, but that which is more immediately for the present support and comfort of life, our own and others; so the products of Canaan were. — Solomon got much by his merchandize, but it should seem David got much more by his conquests; what was Solomon's *four hundred and twenty talents*, to David's *hundred thousand talents of gold*? 1 Chron. xxii. 16. — xxix. 4. Solomon got much by his merchandize, and yet has directed us to a better trade, within reach of the poorest, having assured us from his own experience of both, that the *merchandize of wisdom is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold*, Prov. iii. 14.

CHAP. X.

Still Solomon looks great, and every thing in this chapter adds to his magnificence. We read nothing indeed of his charity, of no hospitals he built, or alms-houses; he made his kingdom so rich that it did not need them; yet no question, many poor were relieved from the abundance of his table. A church he had built, never to be equalled; schools nor colleges he need not build any, his own palace was an academy, and his court a rendezvous of wise and learned men, as well as the centre of all the circulating riches of that part of the world. 1. What abundance of wisdom there was there, appears here by the application which the queen of Sheba made to him, and the great satisfaction she had in her entertainment there, ver. 1—13. and others likewise, ver. 24. 2. What abundance of wealth there was there, appears here by the gold imported, with other things, yearly, ver. 14, 15. and in a triennial return, ver. 22. Gold presented, ver. 25. and gold used in targets and shields, ver. 16, 17. and vessels, ver. 21. — A stately throne he made, ver. 18—20. His chariots and horsemen, ver. 26. His trade with Egypt, ver. 28, 29. And the great plenty of silver and cedars among his people, ver. 27. So that putting all together, it must be owned, as it is here said, ver. 23. that king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches, and for wisdom: Yet what was he to the King of kings? Where Christ is by his word and Spirit, Behold, a greater than Solomon is there.

1. **A**ND when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions. 2. And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones; and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him, of all that was in her heart. 3. And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not any thing hid from the king, which he told her not. 4. And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomons wisdom, and the house that he had built, 5. And the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cup-bearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the LORD: there was no more spirit in her. 6. And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land, of thy acts, and of thy wisdom. 7. Howbeit, I believed not the words until I came, and

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mine eyes had seen it: and behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. 8. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants; which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. 9. Blessed be the LORD thy God which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel; because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice. 10. And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices, as these, which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon. 11. And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir great plenty of almug-trees, and precious stones. 12. And the king made of the almug-trees pillars for the house of the LORD, and for the king's house, harps also and psalteries for singers: there came no such almug-trees, nor were seen unto this day. 13. And king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, besides that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty: so she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants.

We have here an account of the visit which the queen of Sheba made to Solomon, no doubt when he was in the height of his piety and prosperity. Our Saviour calls her the queen of the south, for Sheba lay south from Canaan. The common opinion is, that it was in Africa; and the Christians in Ethiopia, to this day, are confident she came from their country, and that Candace was her successor, who is mentioned, *Acts* viii. 27. But it is more probably thought that she came from the south part of Arabia the happy: It should seem she was a queen regent, sovereign of her country. Many a kingdom had been prevented of its greatest blessings, if a Salick law had been admitted into its constitution. Observe,

1. On what errand the queen of Sheba came, not to treat of trade or commerce, to adjust the limits of their dominions, to court his alliance for their mutual strength, or his assistance against some common enemy, which are the common occasions of the congress of crowned heads, and their interviews: But she came, 1. To satisfy her curiosity, for she had heard of his fame, especially for wisdom, and she came to prove him, whether he was so great a man as he was reported to be, *ver.* 1. Solomon's fleet sailed near the coast of her country, and, probably, might put in there for fresh water, and that way, or some other, *she heard of the fame of Solomon*, that he excelled in wisdom all the children of the east, and nothing would serve her, but she would go herself, and know the truth of it. 2. To receive instruction from him. She came to *hear his wisdom*, and thereby to improve her own, *Matt.* xii. 22. that she might be the better able to govern her own kingdom by his maxims of policy. Those whom God has called to any publick employment, particularly in the magistracy and ministry, should by all means possible be still improving themselves in that knowledge, which will more and more qualify them for it, and enable them to discharge their trust well.—But it should seem, that which she chiefly aimed at, was to be instructed in the things of God; she was religiously inclined, and had heard not only of the fame of Solomon, but *concerning the name of the Lord*, *ver.* 1. the great name of that God whom Solomon worshipped, and from whom he received his wisdom, and with this God she desired to be better acquainted: Therefore doth our Saviour mention her enquiries after God by Solomon, as an aggravation of the stupidity of those who enquire not after God by our Lord Jesus Christ, though he having lain in his bosom, was much better able to instruct them.

2. With what equipage she came: With a very great retinue, agreeable to her rank, intending to try Solomon's wealth and generosity, as well as his wisdom, what entertainment he could and would give to a royal visitant, *ver.* 2. Yet she came not as one begging, but brought enough to bear her charges, and abundantly to recompense Solomon for his respects to her; nothing mean or common, but gold, and precious stones, and spices, because she came to trade for wisdom, which she would purchase at any rate.

3. What entertainment Solomon gave her: He despised not the weakness of her sex, blamed her not for leaving her own business at home, to come so long a journey, and put herself and him to so much trouble and expence, merely to satisfy her curiosity; but bid her welcome, and all her train, gave her liberty to put all her questions, though some, perhaps, were frivolous, some captious, and some over curious, yet he allowed her to *converse with him of all that was in her heart*, *ver.* 2. and gave her a satisfactory answer to all her questions, *ver.* 3. whether natural, moral, politick, or divine. Were they designed to prove him, he gave them such turns as abundantly satisfied her of his uncommon knowledge. Were they designed for her own instruction, (as we suppose most of them were) she received abundant instruction from him, and he made things surprisingly easy,

which she apprehended insuperably difficult, and satisfied her, that there was a *divine sentence in the lips of this king*. But he informed her, no doubt, with particular care concerning God, and his law, and instituted worship. He had taken it for granted, *chap.* viii. 42. that *strangers would hear of his great name*, and would come thither to enquire after him; and now so great a stranger came, we may be sure he was not wanting to assist and encourage her enquiries, and give her a rationale of the temple, and the offices and services of it, that she might be persuaded to serve the Lord whom she now sought.

4. How she was affected with what she saw and heard in Solomon's court. Divers things are here mentioned which she admired; the buildings and furniture of his palace; the provision that was made every day for his table: When she saw that, perhaps she wondered where were mouths for all that meat; but when she saw the multitude of his attendants and guests, she was as ready to wonder where was the meat for all those mouths: The orderly sitting of his servants every one in his place, and the ready attendance of his ministers, without any confusion, their rich liveries, and the mighty decorum with which his cup-bearers waited at his table, these things she admired, as adding much to his magnificence: But above all these, the first thing mentioned, which contained all these, is his wisdom, *ver.* 4. which now she had incontestable proofs of the transcendency of: and the last thing mentioned, which crowned all, is his piety, the *ascent by which he went up to the house of the Lord*, with what gravity and seriousness, and an air of devotion in his countenance, he appeared, when he went to the temple to worship God; with as much humility then, as majesty at other times. Many of the ancient versions read it, *The burnt-offerings which he offered in the house of the Lord*; she observed with what a generous bounty he brought his sacrifices, and with what a pious fervour he attended the offering of them; never did she see so much goodness with so much greatness. Every thing was so surprising, that there was no more spirit in her, but she stood amazed; she had never seen the like.

5. How she expressed her self upon this occasion.

1. She owned her expectation far out-done, though it was highly raised by the report she heard, *ver.* 6, 7. She is far from repenting her journey, or calling herself a fool for undertaking it, but acknowledgeth, it was well worth her while to come so far for the sight of that which she could not believe the report of. Usually, things are represented to us both by common fame, and by our own imagination, much greater than we find them when we come to examine them; but here the truth outwent both fame and fancy. Those that through grace are brought to experience the delights of communion with God, will say, that the one half was not told them of the pleasures of wisdom's ways, and the advantages of her gates. Glorified saints much more will say, it was a true report which they heard of the happiness of heaven, but the thousandth part was not told them, *1 Cor.* ii. 9.

2. She pronounced them happy, that constantly attended him, and waited on him at table, *Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants*, *ver.* 8. they may improve their own wisdom by hearing thine. She was tempted to envy them, and wish herself one of them. Note, It is a great advantage to be in good families, and to have opportunity of frequent converse with those that are wise and good, and communicative: Many have this happiness, who know not how to value it.—With much more reason may we say this of Christ's servants, *Blessed are they that dwell in his house, they will be still praising him*.

3. She blessed God, the giver of Solomon's wisdom and wealth, and the author of his advancement, who had made him king, 1. In kindness to him, that he might have the larger opportunity of doing good with his wisdom. He *delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel*, *ver.* 9. Solomon's preferment began in the prophet's calling him Jedidiah, *because the Lord loved him*, *2 Sam.* xii. 25. It more than doubles our comforts, if we have reason to hope they come from God's delight in us. *It was his pleasure concerning thee*, (so it may be read) *to set thee on the throne*; not for thy merit sake, but because it so seemed good unto him. 2. In kindness to the people, *because the Lord loved Israel for ever*, designed them a lasting bliss, long to survive him that laid the foundations of it. He has made thee king, not that thou mayst live in pomp and pleasure, and do what thou wilt, but *to do judgment and justice*. This she kindly minded Solomon of, and no doubt he took it kindly. Both magistrates and ministers must be more solicitous to do the duty of their places, than to secure the honours and profits of them.—To this she attributes his prosperity, not to his wisdom, for bread is not always *to the wise*, *Eccl.* ix. 11. but *whoso doth judgment and justice, it shall be well with him*, *Jer.* xxii. 11. Thus *giving of thanks must be made for kings*, for good kings, for such kings; they are what God makes them to be.

6. How they parted. (1.) She made a noble present to Solomon, of *gold and spices*, *ver.* 10. David had foretold concerning Solomon, that *to him should be given of the gold of Sheba*, *Psal.* lxxii. 15. The present of gold and spices which the wise men of the east brought to Christ, was signified by this, *Matt.* ii. 11.

ii. 11. Thus he paid for the wisdom she had learned, and did not think she bought it dear.—Those that are taught of God, let them give him their hearts, and the present will be more acceptable than this of gold and spices. Mention is made of the great abundance Solomon had of his own, notwithstanding she presented, and he accepted this gold. What we present to Christ, he needs it not, but will have us so to express our gratitude. The almug-trees are here spoken of, *ver. 11, 12.* as extraordinary, because, perhaps, much admired by the queen of Sheba. 2. Solomon was not behindhand with her. *He gave her whatsoever she asked,* patterns we may suppose of those things that were curious, by which she might make the like, or, perhaps he gave her his precepts of wisdom and piety in writing, *besides that which he gave her of his royal bounty,* *ver. 13.* Thus they who apply themselves to our Lord Jesus, will find him not only greater than Solomon, and wiser, but more kind; whatsoever we ask, it shall be done for us; nay, he will out of his divine bounty, which infinitely exceeds royal bounty, even Solomon's, do for us *more than we are able to ask or think.*

14. ¶ Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year, was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold, 15. Besides that he had of the merchantmen, and of the traffick of the spice-merchants, and of all the kings of Arabia, and of the governors of the country. 16. ¶ And king Solomon made two hundred targets of beaten gold: six hundred *shekels* of gold went to one target. 17. And he made three hundred shields of beaten gold; three pound of gold went to one shield: and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon. 18. ¶ Moreover, the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best gold. 19. The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne was round behind: and there were stays on either side on the place of the feet, and two lions stood beside the stays. 20. And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps: there was not the like made in any kingdom. 21. ¶ And all king Solomons drinking-vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon, were of pure gold, none were of silver; it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon. 22. For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish, with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. 23. So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth, for riches and for wisdom. 24. ¶ And all the earth sought to Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart. 25. And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year. 26. And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem. 27. And the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycamore-trees that are in the vale for abundance. 28. ¶ And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn, the kings merchants received the linen yarn at a price. 29. And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred *shekels* of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, did they bring them out by their means.

We have here a further account of Solomon's prosperity:

1. How he increased his wealth. Though he had much, he still coveted to have more, being willing to try the utmost the things of this world could do to make men happy. (1.) With what gold came from Ophir, *chap. ix. 20.* he brought so much into his country from other places, as that the whole amounted every year to *six hundred and sixty-six talents,* *ver. 14.* an ominous number, compare *Rev. xiii. 18.* and *Ezra ii. 13.* (2.) He received a great deal in customs from the merchants, and in land taxes from the countries his father had conquered, and made tributaries to Israel, *ver. 15.* (3.) He went partner with Hiram in a Tharshish fleet, of and for Tyre, which imported once in three years, not only gold, and silver, and ivory, substantial goods, and serviceable, but apes to play with, and peacocks to please the eye with their feathers, *ver. 22.* I wish this be not an evidence that Solomon and his people, being overcharged with prosperity, by this time grew childish and wanton. (4.) He had presents made him every year from the neighbouring princes and great men, to engage the continuance of his friendship, not so much because they feared him, or were jealous of him, as because they

loved him, and admired his wisdom, had oft occasion to consult him, as an oracle, and sent him these presents by way of fee for his advice in politicks, and (whether it became his grandeur and generosity or no, we will not enquire) he took all that came, even garments and spices, horses and mules, *ver. 24, 25.* (5.) He traded to Egypt for horses, and linen yarn, (or, as some read it, linen cloth) the staple commodities of that country, and had his own merchants or factors whom he employed in this traffick, and who were accountable to him, *ver. 28, 29.* The custom to be paid to the king of Egypt for exported chariots and horses out of Egypt, was very high, but (as bishop Patrick understands it) Solomon having married his daughter, got him to compound for the customs, so that he could bring them up cheaper than his neighbours, which obliged them to buy them of him, which he was wise enough, no doubt, to make his advantage of. This puts an honour upon the trading part of a nation, and sets a tradesman not so much below a gentleman as some place him, that Solomon, one of the greatest men that ever was, thought it no disparagement to him to deal in trade. In all labour there is profit.

2. What use he made of his wealth. He did not hoard it up in his coffers, that he might have it to look upon, and leave behind him. He has in his Ecclesiastes so much exposed the folly of hoarding, that we cannot suppose he should himself be guilty of it: No, God that had given him riches, and wealth, and honour, gave him also power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, *Ecc. v. 19.*

1. He laid out his gold in fine things for himself, which he might the better be allowed to do, when he had before laid out so much in fine things for the house of God. (1.) He made two hundred targets, and three hundred shields, of beaten gold, *ver. 16, 17.* not for service, but for state, to be carried before him, when he appeared in pomp; with us, magistrates have swords and maces carried before them, as the Romans their rods and axes, in token of their power to correct and punish the bad, to whom they are to be a terror: But Solomon had shields and targets carried before him, to signify, that he took more pleasure in using his power for the defence and protection of the good, to whom he would be a praise. Magistrates are *shields of the earth.* (2.) He made a stately throne, on which he sat to give laws to his subjects, audience to ambassadors, and judgment upon appeals, *ver. 18, 19, 20.* It was made of ivory, or elephant's teeth, which was very rich, and yet, as if he had so much gold that he knew not what to do with it, he overlaid that with gold, the best gold. Yet some think he did not cover the ivory all over, but here and there: He rolled it, flowered it, or inlaid it with gold. The stays or arms of this stately chair were supported by the effigies of lions in gold, so were the steps and paces by which he went up to it, to be a memorandum to him of that courage and resolution wherewith he ought to execute judgment, not fearing the face of man. *The righteous, in that post, is bold as a lion.* (3.) He made all his drinking-vessels, and all the furniture of his table, even at his country-seat, of pure gold, *ver. 21.* He did not grudge himself what he had, but took the credit and comfort of it, such as it was. That is good that doth us good.

2. He made it circulate among his subjects, so that the kingdom was as rich as the king; for he had no separate interest of his own to consult, but sought the welfare of his people. Those princes are not governed by Solomon's maxims, who think it policy to keep their subjects poor. Solomon was herein a type of Christ, who is not only rich himself, but enricheth all that are his. Solomon was instrumental to bring so much gold into the country, and disperse it, that *silver was nothing accounted of,* *ver. 21.* There was such plenty of it in Jerusalem, that it was as the stones; and cedars, that used to be great rarities, as common as *sycamore-trees,* *ver. 27.* Such is the nature of worldly wealth, plenty of it makes it the less valuable; much more should the enjoyment of spiritual riches lessen our esteem of all earthly possessions. If gold in abundance would make silver to seem so despicable, shall not wisdom and grace, and the foretastes of heaven, which are far better than gold, make it seem much more so?

Well, thus rich, thus great was Solomon, and thus did he exceed all the kings of the earth, *ver. 23.* Now let us remember, 1. That this was he, who when he was setting out in the world, did not ask for the wealth and honour of it, but asked for a wife and understanding heart. The more moderate our desires are towards earthly things, the better qualified we are for the enjoyment of them, and the more likely to have them. See in Solomon's greatness the performance of God's promise, *chap. iii. 13.* and let it encourage us to seek first the righteousness of God's kingdom. 2. That this was he, who when he was in the midst of all these enjoyments, wrote a whole book to shew the vanity of all worldly things, and the vexation of spirit that attends them, their insufficiency to make us happy, and the folly of setting our hearts upon them; and to recommend to us the practice of serious godliness, as that which is the whole of man, and will do infinitely more towards the making of us easy and happy, than all the wealth and power that he was master of; and which, through the grace of God is within our reach, when the thousandth part of Solomon's

mon's greatness is a thousand times more than we can ever be so vain as to promise our selves in this world.

C H A P. XI.

This chapter begins with as melancholy a but as almost any we find in all the Bible: Hitherto we have read nothing of Solomon but what was great and good; but the lustre both of his goodness, and of his greatness, is here sullied and eclipsed, and his sun sets under a cloud. (1.) The glory of his piety is stained by his departure from God and his duty in his latter days, marrying strange gods, ver. 4—8. (2.) The glory of his prosperity is stained, by God's displeasure against him, and the fruits of that displeasure. (1.) He sent him an angry message, ver. 2—13. (2.) He stirred up enemies, which gave him disturbance, Hadad, ver. 14—22. Rezon, ver. 23—25. (3.) He gave away ten tribes of his twelve from his posterity after him to Jeroboam, whom therefore he sought in vain to slay, ver. 26—40. And this is all that remains here to be told concerning Solomon, but only his death and burial, ver. 41—43. for there is nothing perfect under the sun, but all is so above the sun.

1. **B**UT king Solomon loved many strange women (together with the daughter of Pharaoh) women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites: 2. Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. 3. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. 4. For it came to pass when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. 5. For Solomon went after Ashtarothe the goddesses of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father. 7. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem; and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. 8. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense, and sacrificed unto their gods.

This is a sad story, and very surprising, of Solomon's defection and degeneracy.

1. Let us enquire into the occasions and particulars of it. Shall Solomon fall, that was the beauty of Israel, and so great a blessing of his generation? Yes, it is too true, and the scripture is faithful in relating it, and repeating it, and referring to it long after, *Neh. xiii. 26. There was no king like Solomon who was beloved of his God, yet even him did outlandish women cause to sin*: there is the summary of his apostasy; it was the woman that deceived him, and was first in this transgression.

(1.) He doted on strange women, *many strange women*. Here his revolt began. 1. He gave himself to women, which his mother had particularly cautioned him against, *Prov. xxxi. 3. Give not thy strength unto women*, (perhaps alluding to Sampson, who lost his strength, by giving information of it to a woman) for it is that which as much as any thing destroys kings. His father David's fall began with the lusts of the flesh, which he should have taken warning by. The love of women has cast down many wounded, *Prov. vii. 26. and many (saith bishop Hall) have had their head broken by their own rib*. 2. He took many women, so many, that at last they amounted to seven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines; a thousand in all, and not one good one among them, as he himself owns in his penitential sermon, *Ecclef. vii. 28. for no woman of established virtue would be one of such a rout*. God had by his law particularly forbidden the kings to multiply either horses or wives, *Deut. xvii. 16, 17*. How he broke the former law, multiplying horses, and having them out of Egypt too, (which was expressly prohibited in that law) we read in the verse before, *chap. x. 29*. and here, how he broke the latter (which proved of more fatal consequence) in multiplying wives. Note, Lesser sins made bold with, open the door to greater. David had multiplied wives too much, and perhaps that made Solomon presume it lawful. Note, Those that are in reputation for religion, if in any thing they set an ill example, know not what a great deal of mischief they may do by it, particularly to their own children. One ill act of a good man may be of more pernicious consequence to others, than twenty of a wicked man. Probably Solomon, when he began to multiply wives, intended not to exceed his father's number; but the way of sin is down-hill, they that are got into it, cannot easily stop themselves. Divine wisdom has appointed one woman for

one man, did so at first; and they who do not think one enough, will not think two or three enough; unbridled lust will be unbounded, and the loosened hind will wander endlessly.

But this was not all: 3. They were strange women, Moabites, Ammonites, &c. of the nations which God had particularly forbidden them to intermarry with, *ver. 2*. Some think it was in policy that he married these foreigners, by them to get intelligence of the state of those countries: I rather fear it was because the daughters of Israel were too grave and modest for him, and those foreigners pleased him with the looseness and wantonness of their dress, and air, and conversation. Or perhaps it was looked upon as a piece of state to have his seraglio, as other his treasures, replenished with that which was far fetched, as if that were too great an honour for the best of his subjects, which would really have been a disgrace to the meanest of them, to be his misses. And, 4. To compleat the mischief, Solomon clave unto these in love, *ver. 2*. He not only kept them, but was extravagantly fond of them, set his heart upon them, spent his time among them, thought every thing well they said and did, and despised Pharaoh's daughter, his rightful wife, who had been dear to him, and all the ladies of Israel, in comparison of them. Solomon was master of a great deal of knowledge, but to what purpose, when he had no better a government of his appetites?

(2.) He was drawn by them to the worship of strange gods; as Israel to Baal-peor by the daughters of Moab. This was the ill consequence of his multiplying wives. We have reason to think it impaired his health, and hastened upon him the decays of age; it exhausted his treasure, which was vast indeed, but he would soon find it little enough to maintain the pride and vanity of all these women; perhaps it occasioned him in his latter end to neglect his business, by which he lost his supplies from abroad, and was forced, for the keeping up of his port, to burthen his subjects with those taxes which they complained of, *chap. xii. 5*. But these consequences were nothing so bad as this, *His wives turned away his heart after other gods*, *ver. 3, 4*.

1. He grew cool and indifferent in his own religion, and remits in the service of the God of Israel. *His heart was not perfect with the Lord his God*, *ver. 4*. nor did he follow him fully, *ver. 6*. like David. We cannot suppose that he quite cast off the worship of God, much less that he restrained or hindered it; the temple-service went on as usual, but he grew less frequent, and less serious in his ascent to the house of the Lord, and his attendance on his altar; he left his first love, lost his zeal for God, and did not persevere to the end as he had begun, therefore it is said he was not perfect, because he was not constant; and he followed not God fully, because he turned from following him, and did not continue to the end.—His father David had many faults, but he never neglected the worship of God, nor grew remiss in that, as Solomon did, his wives using all their arts to divert him from it, and there began his apostasy.

2. He tolerated and maintained his wives in their idolatry, and made no scruple of joining with them in it: Pharaoh's daughter was profelyted (as is supposed) to the Jews religion, but when he began to grow careless in the worship of God himself, he used no means to convert his other wives to it; in complaisance to them he built chapels for their gods, *ver. 7, 8*. maintained their priests, and occasionally did himself attend their altars; making a jest of it, asking what harm was there in it, were not all religions alike? which (saith bishop Patrick) has been the disease of some great wits; when he humoured one thus, the rest would take it ill if he did not in like manner gratify them, so that he did it for all his wives, *ver. 8*. and at last came to that degree of impiety, that he set up a high place for Chemosh in the hill that is before Jerusalem, the mount of olives, as it were to confront the temple which he himself had built; these high places continued here, not utterly demolished, till Josiah did it, *2 Kings xxiii. 13*. this is the account here given of Solomon's apostasy.

3. Let us now pause a while and lament Solomon's fall, and we may justly stand and wonder at it; *how is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed! Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid*, as the prophet exclaims in a like case, *Jer. ii. 12*. Strange! 1. That Solomon in his old age should be ensnared with fleshly lusts, youthful lusts; as we must never presume upon the strength of our resolutions, so neither upon the weakness of our corruptions, so as to be secure and off our guard. 2. That so wise a man as Solomon was, so famed for a quick understanding and sound judgment, should suffer himself to be made such a fool of by a parcel of silly women. 3. That one who had so often and so plainly warned others of the danger of the love of women, should himself be so wretchedly bewitched with it; it is easier to see a mischief and to shew it others than to shun it our selves. 4. That so good a man, so zealous for the worship of God, and that had been conversant with divine things, who prayed that excellent prayer at the dedication of the temple, should do these ill things: Is this Solomon? Is all his wisdom and devotion come to this at last? Never was gallant ship so wrecked; never was crown so profaned.

What shall we say to this? Why God permitted it, it is not for us to enquire, his way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters,

waters, he knew how to bring glory to himself out of it; God foresaw it when he said concerning him that should build the temple, *if he commit iniquity*, 2 Sam. vii. 14. (2.) But it concerns us to enquire what good use we may make of it. 1. Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall; we see how weak we are of our selves without the grace of God, let us therefore live in a constant dependence on that grace. 2. See the danger of a prosperous condition, and how hard it is to overcome the temptations of it; Solomon, like Jeshurun, waxed fat, and then kicked; the food convenient which Agur prayed for is safer and better than the food abundant which Solomon was even surfeited with. 3. See what need those have to stand upon their guard who have made a great profession of religion, and shewed themselves forward and zealous in devotion, because the devil will set upon them most violently, and if they miscarry themselves, the reproach is the greater; it is the evening that commends the day, let us therefore fear lest having run well we seem to come short.

9. ¶ And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, 10. And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded. 11. Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. 12. Notwithstanding, in thy days I will not do it, for David thy fathers sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. 13. Howbeit, I will not rend away all the kingdom: but will give one tribe to thy son, for David my servants sake, and for Jerusalems sake which I have chosen.

Here is, 1. God's anger against Solomon for his sin, the thing he did *displeased the Lord*; time was when the Lord *loved Solomon*, 2 Sam. xii. 24. and delighted in him, chap. x. 9. but now *the Lord was angry with Solomon*, ver. 9. for there was in his sin, (1.) The most base ingratitude that could be, he turned from the Lord *which had appeared unto him twice*, once before he began to build the temple, chap. iii. 5. and once after he had dedicated it, chap. ix. 2. God keeps account of the gracious visits he makes us, whether we do or no, knows how often he has appeared to us, and appeared for us, and will remember it against us if we *turn from him*: God's appearing to Solomon was such a sensible confirmation of his faith as should have for ever prevented his worshipping of *any other god*; it was also such a distinguishing favour, and put such an honour upon him, as he ought never to have forgotten, especially considering what God said to him in both these appearances. (2.) The most wilful disobedience; this was the very thing concerning which *God had commanded him, that he should not go after other gods*, yet he was not kept tight by such an express admonition, ver. 10. Those who have dominion over men are too apt to forget God's dominion over them, and while they demand obedience from their inferiors to deny it to him, who is their Supream.

2. The message he sent him hereupon, ver. 11. *The Lord said unto Solomon*, it is likely by a prophet, that he must expect to smart for his apostasy: and here, (1.) The sentence is just, that since he had revolted from God, part of his kingdom should revolt from his family; he had given God's glory to the creature, and therefore God would give his crown to his servant, *I will rend the kingdom from thee*, in thy posterity, and will *give it to thy servant*, who shall bear rule over much of that for which thou hast laboured, this was a great mortification to Solomon, who pleased himself, no doubt, with the prospect of the entail of his rich kingdom upon his heirs for ever; sin brings ruin upon families, cuts off entails, alienates estates, and lays mens honour in the dust.—(2.) Yet the mitigations of it are very kind, for David's sake, ver. 12, 13. *i. e.* for the sake of the promise made to David; thus all the favour God shews to man is for *Christ's sake*, and for the sake of the covenant made with him; the kingdom shall be rent from Solomon's house, but (1.) Not presently; Solomon shall not live to see it done, but it shall be rent *out of the hand of his son*, a son that was born to him by one of his strange wives, for his mother was an Ammonitess, (1 Kings xiv. 31.) and probably had been a promoter of idolatry. What comfort can a man take in leaving children and an estate behind him, if he do not leave a blessing behind him! Yet if judgments be coming, it is a favour to us, if they come not in our days, as 2 Kings xx. 19.—(2.) Not wholly; one tribe, that of Judah, the strongest and most numerous, shall remain to the house of David, ver. 13. for Jerusalem's sake, which David built, and for the sake of the temple there which Solomon built, these shall not go into other hands; Solomon did not quickly nor wholly turn away from God, therefore God did not quickly nor wholly take the kingdom from him.

Upon this message which God graciously sent to Solomon to

awaken his conscience and bring him to repentance, we have reason to hope that he humbled himself before God, confessed his sin, begged pardon, and returned to his duty; that he then published his repentance in the book of Ecclesiastes, where he bitterly laments his own folly and madness, chap. vii. 25, 26. and warns others to take heed of the like evil courses, and to *fear God and keep his commandments*, in consideration of *the judgment to come*, which, it is likely, had made him tremble as it did Felix; that penitential sermon was as true an indication of a heart broken for sin, and turned from it, as David's penitential psalms, though of another nature; God's grace in his people works variously; thus, though Solomon fell, *he was not utterly cast down*; what God had said to David concerning him was fulfilled, *I will chasten him with the rod of men, but my mercy shall not depart from him*, 2 Sam. vii. 14, 15. Though God may suffer those, whom he loves, to fall into sin, he will not suffer them to lie still in it; Solomon's defection, though it was much his reproach, and a great blemish to his personal character, yet it did not so far break in upon the character of his reign, but that it was afterwards made the pattern of a good reign, 2 Chron. xi. 17. where they are said to do well, while *they walked in the way of David and Solomon*.—But though we have all this reason to hope he repented and found mercy, yet the holy Ghost did not think fit expressly to record it, but left it doubtful, for warning to others not to sin upon presumption of repenting, for it is but a peradventure whether *God will give them repentance*, or if he do, whether he will give the evidence of it to themselves or others; great sinners may recover themselves, and have the benefit of their repentance, and yet be denied both the comfort and credit of it, the guilt may be taken away, and yet not the reproach.

14. ¶ And the LORD stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite; he *was* of the kings seed in Edom. 15. For it came to pass when David was in Edom, and Joab the captain of the host was gone up to bury the slain, after he had smitten every male in Edom: 16. (For six months did Joab remain there with all Israel, until he had cut off every male in Edom) 17. That Hadad fled, he and certain Edomites of his fathers servants with him, to go into Egypt; Hadad *being* yet a little child. 18. And they arose out of Midian, and came to Paran, and they took men with them out of Paran, and they came to Egypt, unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, which gave him an house, and appointed him victuals, and gave him land. 19. And Hadad found great favour in the sight of Pharaoh, so that he gave him to wife the sister of his own wife, the sister of Tahpenes the queen. 20. And the sister of Tahpenes bare him Genubath his son, whom Tahpenes weaned in Pharaohs house: and Genubath was in Pharaohs household, among the sons of Pharaoh. 21. And when Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers, and that Joab the captain of the host was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, Let me depart; that I may go to mine own country. 22. Then Pharaoh said unto him, But what hast thou lacked with me, that behold, thou seekest to go to thine own country? And he answered, Nothing: Howbeit let me go in any wise. 23. ¶ And God stirred him up *another* adversary, Rezon, the son of Eliadah, which fled from his lord Hadadezer king of Zobah. 24. And he gathered men unto him, and became captain over a band, when David slew them of Zobah: and they went to Damascus, and dwelt therein, and reigned in Damascus. 25. And he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, beside the mischief that Hadad did: and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria.

While Solomon kept close to God and to his duty, there was *no adversary nor evil occurrent*, chap. v. 4. nothing to create him any disturbance or uneasiness in the least, but here we have an account of two adversaries that appeared against him, inconsiderable and that could not have done any thing worth taking notice of, if Solomon had not first made God his enemy: What hurt could Hadad or Rezon have done to so great and powerful a king as Solomon was, if he had not by sin made himself mean and weak, and then those little people menace and insult him? If God be on our side we need not fear the greatest adversary, but if he be against us he can make us fear the least, and the very grasshopper shall be a burthen.

Both these adversaries God stirred up, ver. 14, 23.—though they themselves were moved by principles of ambition or revenge, God made use of them to serve his design of correcting Solomon; though the principal judgment threatened was deferred, *viz.* the rending of the kingdom from him, yet he himself was made to feel the smart of the rod, for his greater humiliation. Note, Whoever are any way adversaries to us, we must take notice of

the hand of God stirring them up to be so; as he bid Shimei curse David; we must look through the instruments of our trouble to the author of it, and hear the Lord's controversy in it.

Both these adversaries had the original of their enmity to Solomon and Israel laid in David's time, and in his conquests of their respective countries, *ver.* 15, 24. Solomon had the benefit and advantage of his father's successes, both in the enlargement of his dominion, and the increase of his treasure, and had never known any thing but the benefit of them; if he had kept close to God, but now he finds disadvantages to balance the advantages, and that David had made himself enemies, which were thorns in his eyes; they that are too free in giving provocation, ought to consider, that perhaps it may be remembered in time to come, and returned with interest to theirs after them; having so few friends in this world, it is our wisdom not to make ourselves more enemies than we needs must.

1. Hadad, an Edomite, was an adversary to Solomon; we are not told what he did against him, nor which way he gave him disturbance, only in general, that he was an adversary to him; but we are told, (1.) What induced him to bear Solomon a grudge, David had conquered Edom, *2 Sam.* viii. 14. Joab put all the males to the sword, *ver.* 15, 16. a terrible execution he made, avenging on Edom their old enmity to Israel, yet, perhaps, with too great a severity; from this general slaughter, while Joab was burying the slain, (for he left not any alive of their own people to bury them; and buried they must be, or they would be an annoyance to the country, *Ezek.* xxxix. 12.) Hadad, a branch of the royal family, then a little child, was taken and preserved by some of the king's servants, and brought to Egypt, *ver.* 17. They halted by the way, in Midian first, and then in Paran, where they furnished themselves with men, not to fight for them, or force their passage, but to attend them, that their young master might come into Egypt, with an equipage agreeable to his quality; there he was kindly sheltered and entertained by Pharaoh, as a distressed prince, was well provided for, and so recommended himself, that in process of time he married the queen's sister, *ver.* 19. and by her had a child, which the queen herself took such a kindness to, that she brought him up in Pharaoh's house, among the king's children.—(2.) What enabled him to do Solomon a mischief; he returned to his own country again upon the death of David and Joab, in which it should seem he settled, and remained quiet while Solomon continued wise and watchful for the publick good, but from which he had opportunity of making inroads upon Israel, when Solomon having sinned away his wisdom, as Sampson did his strength, (and in the same way) grew careless of publick affairs, was off his guard himself, and had forfeited the divine protection.—What vexation he gave to Solomon we are not here told, but only how lothe Pharaoh was to part with him, and how earnestly he solicited his stay, *ver.* 22. *What hast thou lacked with me?* Nothing, saith Hadad, but however let me go to my own country, my native air, my native soil: Peter Martyr has a pious reflection upon this; That heaven is our home, and we ought to keep up a holy affection to that, and desire towards it, even then when the world, the place of our banishment, smiles most upon us; doth it ask, what have we lacked, that we are so willing to be gone, we may answer, nothing that the world can do for us, but however, let us go thither where our hope, and honour, and treasure is.

2. Rezon, a Syrian, was another adversary to Solomon; when David conquered the Syrians, he headed the remains, lived at large by spoil and rapine, till Solomon grew careless, and then he got possession of Damascus, reigned there, *ver.* 24. and over the country about, *ver.* 25. and he created troubles to Israel, probably, in conjunction with Hadad, all the days of Solomon, *viz.* after his apostasy; or he was an enemy to Israel during all Solomon's reign, and upon all occasions vented his then impotent malice against them; but till Solomon's revolt, when his defence was departed from him, he could not do them any mischief; it is said of him, that he abhorred Israel; other princes loved and admired Israel and Solomon, and courted their friendship, but here was one that abhorred them; the greatest and best of princes and people, that are never so much respected by the most, yet perhaps, will be hated and abhorred by some.

26. ¶ And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zereda, Solomons servant (whose mothers name was Zeruah, a widom woman) even he lift up *his* hand against the king. 27. And this *was* the cause that he lift up *his* hand against the king: Solomon built Millo, and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father. 28. And the man Jeroboam *was* a mighty man of valour: And Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph. 29. And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way: and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they

two *were* alone in the field. 30. And Ahijah caught the new garment that *was* on him, and rent it *in* twelve pieces. 30. And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee: 32. (But he shall have one tribe for my servant Davids sake, and for Jerusalems sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel) 33. Because they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtaroth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do *that which is* right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments; as *did* David his father. 34. Howbeit, I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him prince all the days of his life, for David my servants sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes: 35. But I will take the kingdom out of his sons hand, and will give it unto thee, *even* ten tribes. 36. And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there. 37. And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. 38. And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do *that is* right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee. 39. And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever. 40. Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam: and Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon.

We have here the first mention of that infamous name Jeroboam the son of Nebat, *that made Israel to sin*; he is here brought upon the stage as an adversary to Solomon, whom God had expressly told, *ver.* 11. that he would give the greatest part of his kingdom to his servant, and Jeroboam was the man. We have here an account,

1. Of his extraction, *ver.* 26. he was of the tribe of Ephraim, the next in honour to Judah, his mother was a widow, to whom providence made up the loss of a husband in a son that was active and ingenious, and (we may suppose) a great support and comfort to her.

2. Of his elevation. It was Solomon's wisdom, when he had work to do, to employ proper persons in it; he observed Jeroboam to be a very industrious young man, one that minded his business, took a pleasure in it, and did it with all his might, and therefore he gradually advanced him, till at length he made him receiver general for the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, or perhaps, put him into an office equivalent to that of lord lieutenant of those two countries, for he was ruler of the burthen, or tribute, *i. e.* either of the taxes, or of the militia of the house of Joseph.—Note, Industry is the way to preferment, *Seekest thou a man diligent in his business*, that will take care and pains, and go through with it, he shall stand before kings, and not always be on the level with mean men; observe a difference between David, and both his predecessor, and his successor; when Saul saw a valiant man, he took him to himself, *1 Sam.* xiv. 52. when Solomon saw an industrious man, he preferred him; but David's eyes were upon the faithful in the Lord, that they might dwell with him; if he saw a godly man, he preferred him, for he was a man after God's heart, whose countenance beholds the upright

3. Of his designation to the government of the ten tribes, after the death of Solomon.—Some think, he was himself plotting against Solomon, and contriving to rise to the throne, that he was turbulent and aspiring; the Jews say, that when he was employed by Solomon in building Millo, he took opportunities of reflecting upon Solomon as oppressive to his people, and suggesting that which would alienate them from his government; it is not indeed probable, he should say much to that purpose, for Solomon would have got notice of it, and it would have balked his preferment, but it is plainly intimated that he had it in his thoughts, for the prophet tells him, *ver.* 37. *Thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth*; but this was the cause, or rather, this was the story of his lifting up of his hand against the king, he made him ruler over the tribes of Joseph, and as he was going to take possession of his government, he was told by a prophet in God's name, that he should be king, which emboldened him to aim high, and in some instances to oppose the king, and give him some vexation.

1. The prophet, by whom this message was sent, was Ahijah of Shiloh, we shall read of him again, *chap. xiv.* 2. it seems Shiloh was not so perfectly forsaken and forgotten of God, but that in remembrance of the former days it was blessed with a prophet; he delivered himself to Jeroboam in the way, his servants being probably ordered to retire, as in a like case, *1 Sam. ix. 27.* when Samuel delivered this message to Saul; God's word was nevertheless sacred and sure for being delivered to him thus obscurely, under a hedge, it may be.

2. The sign by which it was represented to him, was the rending of a garment into twelve pieces, and giving him ten, *ver. 30.* it is not certain whether the garment was Jeroboam's, as it is commonly taken for granted, or Ahijah's, which is more probable, *he (i. e. the prophet) had clad himself with a new garment,* on purpose that he might with it give him a sign; the rending of the kingdom from Saul was signified by the rending of Samuel's mantle, not Saul's, *1 Sam. xv. 27, 28.* and it was more significant to give him ten pieces of that which was not his own before, than of that which was; the prophets, both true and false, used such signs, even in the New Testament, as Agabus, *Acts xxii. 1-4.*

3. The message itself, which is very particular.

(1.) He assures him, that he should be king over ten of the twelve tribes of Israel, *ver. 31.* the meanness of his extraction and employment should be no hindrance to his advancement, when the God of Israel saith (by whom kings reign) *I will give ten tribes unto thee.*

(2.) He tells him the reason, not for his good character or deserts, but for the chastising of Solomon's apostasy, because he and his family, and many of his people with him, *have forsaken me, and worshipped other gods,* *ver. 33.* it was because they had done ill, not because he was likely to do much better; thus Israel must know it is not for their righteousness, that they are made masters of Canaan, but for the wickedness of the Canaanites, *Deut. ix. 4.*—Jeroboam did not deserve so good a post, but Israel deserved so bad a prince. In telling him, that the reason why he rent the kingdom from the house of Solomon, was, because they had forsaken God, he warns him to take heed of sinning away his preferment in like manner.

(3.) He limits his expectations to the ten tribes only, and to them in reversion after the death of Solomon; lest he should aim at the whole, and give immediate disturbance to Solomon's government, he is here told, 1. That two tribes (called here one tribe, because little Benjamin was in a manner lost in the thousands of Judah) should remain sure to the house of David, and he must never make any attempt upon them. *He shall have one tribe,* *ver. 32.* and again, *ver. 36.* *That David may have a lamp,* i. e. a shining name and memory, *Psal. cxxxii. 17.* and his family, as a royal family, might not be extinct. He must not think that David was rejected, as Saul was; no, God would not take his loving kindness from him, as he did from Saul. The house of David must be supported and kept in reputation for all this, because out of it the Messiah must arise. *Destroy it not, for that blessing is in it.* (2.) That Solomon must keep possession during his life, *ver. 34, 35.* Jeroboam therefore must not offer to dethrone him, but wait with patience till his day shall come to fall. Solomon shall be prince all the days of his life, not for his own sake, he had forfeited his crown to the justice of God, but for David my servant's sake, because he kept my commandments. Children that do not tread in their parents steps, yet oft fare the better in this world for their good parents piety.

(4.) He is given to understand, that he will be upon his good behaviour: The grant of the crown must run *quam diu se bene gesserit;* If thou wilt do what is right in my sight, I will build thee a sure house, and not otherwise, *ver. 38.* intimating, that if he forsook God, even his advancement to the throne, would in time lay his family in the dust; whereas the seed of David, though afflicted, should not be afflicted for ever, *ver. 39.* but should flourish again, as it did in many of the illustrious kings of Judah, who reigned in glory, when Jeroboam's family was extirpated.

4. Jeroboam's flight into Egypt hereupon, *ver. 40.* Some way or other Solomon came to know of all this; probably, from Jeroboam's own talk of it; he could not conceal it, as Saul did, nor keep his own counsel; if he had, he might have staid in his own country, and been preparing there for his future advancement; but letting it be known, (1.) Solomon foolishly sought to kill his successor. Had not he taught others, that whatever devices are in mens hearts, *the counsel of the Lord that shall stand?* And yet doth he himself think to defeat that counsel? (2.) Jeroboam prudently withdrew into Egypt; though God's promise would have secured him any where, yet he would use means for his own preservation, and was well content to live in exile and obscurity for a while, being sure of a kingdom at last. And shall not we be so, who have a better kingdom in reserve?

41. And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the book

of the acts of Solomon? 42. And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem, over all Israel, was forty years. 43. And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead.

We have here the conclusion of Solomon's story, and in it, 1. Reference is had to another history then extant, but (not being divinely inspired) since lost, *the book of the acts of Solomon,* *ver. 41.* Probably, this book was writ by a chronologer or historiographer, whom he employed to write his annals, out of which the sacred writer extracted what God saw fit to transmit to the church. 2. A summary of the years of his reign, *ver. 42.* *He reigned in Jerusalem* (not as his father, part of his time in Hebron, and part in Jerusalem) *over all Israel,* (not as his son, and his father in the beginning of his time, over Judah only) *forty years.* His reign was as long as his fathers, but not his life. Sin shortened his days. 3. His death and burial, and successor, *ver. 43.* (1.) He followed his fathers to the grave; slept with them, and was buried in David's burying place, with honour, no doubt. (2.) His son followed him in the throne. Thus the graves are in filling with the generations that go off, and houses are in filling with those that are growing up. As the grave cries, Give, give; so land is never lost for want of an heir.

C H A P. XII.

The glory of the kingdom of Israel was in its height and perfection in Solomon, it was long in coming to it, but it soon declined, and began to sink and wither in the very next reign; as we find in this chapter, where we have the kingdom divided, and thereby weakened, and made little in comparison with what it had been. Here is, (1.) Rehoboam's accession to the throne, and Jeroboam's return out of Egypt, ver. 1, 2. (2.) The peoples petition to Rehoboam for the redress of grievances, and the rough answer he gave, by the advice of his young counsellors, to that petition, ver. 3—15. (3.) The revolt of the ten tribes thereupon, and their setting up of Jeroboam, ver. 16—20. (4.) Rehoboam's attempt to reduce them, and the prohibition God gave to that attempt, ver. 21—24. (5.) Jeroboam's establishment of his government upon idolatry, ver. 25—33. Thus did Judah become weak, being deserted by their brethren; and Israel, by deserting the house of the Lord.

1. **A**ND Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king. 2. And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard of it (for he was fled from the presence of king Solomon, and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt) 3. That they sent and called him: and Jeroboam, and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam, saying, 4. Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee. 5. And he said unto them, Depart yet for three days, then come again to me. And the people departed. 6. And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men that stood before Solomon his father, while he yet lived, and said, How do you advise, that I may answer this people? 7. And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever. 8. But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him: 9. And he said unto them, What counsel give ye, that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us, lighter? 10. And the young men that were grown up with him, spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my fathers loins. 11. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. 12. ¶ So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day. 13. And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old mens counsel that they gave him; 14. And spake to them after the coun-

fel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke; my father *also* chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. 15. Wherefore the king hearkned not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

Solomon had a thousand wives and concubines, yet we read but of one son he had to bear up his name, and he a fool. It is said, *Hof. iv. 10. They shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase.* Sin is an ill way of building up a family.—Rehoboam was the son of the wisest of men, yet did not inherit his father's wisdom, and then it stood him in little stead to inherit his father's throne. Neither wisdom nor grace run in a blood. Solomon came to the crown very young, yet he was then a wise man: Rehoboam, at forty years old, when men will be wise if ever they will, yet he was then foolish. Wisdom doth not go by age, nor is it the multitude of years, nor the advantages of education that reaches it. Solomon's court was a mart of wisdom, and the rendezvous of learned men, and Rehoboam the darling of the court; and yet all was not sufficient to make him a wise man: *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.* No dispute is made of Rehoboam's succession, upon the death of his father he was immediately proclaimed: But,

1. The people desire a treaty with him at Shechem, and he condescends to meet them there. (1.) Their pretence was to make him king, but the design was to unmake him. They would give him a publick inauguration, in another place than the city of David, that he might not seem to be king of Judah only: They have ten parts in him, and will have him among themselves for once, that they might recognize his title. (2.) The place was ominous; at Shechem, where Abimelech set up himself, *Jude 9.* yet had been famous for the convention of the states there, *Josh. xxiv. 1.* We may suppose Rehoboam knew of the threatening that the kingdom should be rent from him, and hoped by going to Shechem, and treating there with the ten tribes, to prevent it; yet it proves the most impolitick thing he could do, and hastens the rupture.

2. The representatives of the tribes address to him to be eased of the taxes they were burthened with. The meeting being appointed, they sent for Jeroboam out of Egypt to come and be their speaker; which they needed not to have done, he knew what God had designed him for, and would have come, though he had not been sent for, for now was his time to expect the possession of the promised crown.—In their address, (1.) They complain of the last reign; *Thy father made our yoke grievous,* ver. 4. They complain not of his father's idolatry, and revolt from God, that which was the greatest grievance of all, was none to them; so careless and indifferent were they in the matters of religion, as if God or Moloch were all one, so they might but live at ease, and pay no taxes.—Yet the complaint was groundless and unjust: Never did people live more at ease than they did, nor in greater plenty. Did they pay taxes? It was to advance the strength and magnificence of their kingdom. If Solomon's buildings cost them money, they cost them no blood, as war would do. Were many servile hands employed about them? They were not the hands of the Israelites. Were the taxes a burthen? How could that be, when Solomon imported bullion in such plenty, that silver was in a manner as common as the stones? So that they did but render to Solomon the things that were Solomon's. Nay, suppose there was some hardship put upon them, were they not told before, that this would be the manner of the king, and yet they would have one. The best government cannot secure itself from reproach and censure, no not Solomon's. Factious spirits will never want something to complain of. I know nothing in Solomon's administration, that could make the peoples yoke grievous, unless, perhaps, the women which in his latter days he doted on, were connived at in oppressing them. (2.) They demand relief from him, and on that condition will continue in their allegiance to the house of David: They asked not to be wholly free from paying taxes; but to have the burthen made lighter; that was all their care, to save their money, whether their religion was supported, and the government protected or no. All seek their own.

3. Rehoboam consulted with those about him what answer he should give to this address. It was prudent to take advice, especially, having so weak a head of his own; yet upon this occasion, it was impolitick to take time himself to consider, for thereby he gave time to the disaffected people to ripen things for a revolt; and his deliberating in so plain a case, would be improved as an indication of the little concern he had for the peoples ease: They saw what they must expect, and prepared accordingly. Now,

(1.) The grave experienced men of his council, advised him by all means to give the petitioners a kind answer, to speak them fair, and promise them fair, and this day, this critical day to serve them, *i. e.* tell them, that he was their humble servant, and that he would redress all their grievances, and make it his

business to please them, and make them easy. Deny thy self (say they) so far as to do this, for this once, and they will be *thy servants for ever.* When the present heat is allayed with a soft answer, and the assembly dismissed, their cooler thoughts would reconcile and fix them to Solomon's family still. Note, The way to rule, is to serve; to do good, and stoop to do it; to become all things to all men, and so win their hearts: Those in any power really fit highest, and easiest, and safest, that do so.

(2.) The young men of his council were hot and haughty, and they advised him to return a severe and threatening answer to the peoples demands. It was an instance of Rehoboam's weakness, 1. That he did not affect aged counsellors, but had a better opinion of the young men that had grown up with him, and with whom he was familiar, ver. 8. days should speak. It was a folly for him to think that because they had been his agreeable companions in the sports and pleasures of his youth, they were therefore fit to have the management of the affairs of his kingdom. Great wits have not always the most wisdom; nor are those to be relied on as our best friends, that know how to make us merry, for that will not make us happy. It is of great consequence to young people that are setting out in the world, whom they associate with, accommodate themselves to, and depend upon for advice. If they reckon those that feed their pride, gratify their vanity, and farther them in their pleasures, their best friends, they are already marked for ruin. 2. That he did not affect moderate counsels; but was pleased with those that put him upon harsh and rigorous methods, and advised him to double the taxes, whether there was occasion for it or no; and to tell them in plain terms, that he would do so, ver. 10, 11. They thought the old men expressed themselves but dully, ver. 7. they affect to be witty in their advice, and value themselves by that. The old men did not undertake to put words into Rehoboam's mouth, only counselled him to speak good words: but the young men will furnish him with very quaint and pretty phrases, and pert similitudes; *My little finger shall be thicker than my fathers reins,* &c. That is not always the best sense, that is best worded.

4. He answered the people according to the counsel of the young men, ver. 14, 15. He affected to be haughty and imperious, and fancied he could carry all before him with a high hand, and therefore would rather run the risque of losing them, than deny himself so far as to give them good words. Note, Many ruin themselves by consulting their humour more than their interest.

See, 1. How Rehoboam was infatuated in his counsels. He could not have acted more foolishly and impolitically. 1. He owned their reflections upon his father's government to be true, *my father made your yoke heavy,* and therein was unjust to his father's memory, which he might easily have vindicated from the imputation. 2. He fancied himself better able to manage them, and impose upon them, than his father was; not considering that he was vastly inferior to him in conduct. Could he think to support the blemishes of his father's reign, who could never pretend to come near the glories of it? 3. He threatened not only to squeeze them by taxes, but to chastise them by cruel laws, and severe executions of them; which should be not as whips only, but as scorpions, whips with rowels in them, that will fetch blood at every lash. In short, he would use them as brute beasts, load them, and beat them at his pleasure; not caring whether they loved him or no, he would make them fear him. 4. He gave this provocation to a people that by long ease and prosperity were made wealthy, and strong, and proud, and would not be trampled upon, as a poor cowed dispirited people may; that were now disposed to revolt, and had one ready to head them. Sure never was man so blinded by pride and affectation of arbitrary power, than which nothing more fatal.

2. How God's counsels were hereby fulfilled. It was *from the Lord*, ver. 15. He left Rehoboam to his own folly, and *hid from his eyes the things which belonged to his peace*, that the kingdom might be rent from him. Note, God serves his own wife and righteous purposes, by the imprudences and iniquities of men, and snares sinners in the work of their own hands. They that lose the kingdom of heaven, throw it away, as Rehoboam did his, by their own wilfulness and folly.

16. ¶ So when all Israel saw that the king hearkned not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither *have we* inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents. 17. But *as for* the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. 18. Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who *was* over the tribute; and all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died: therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem. 19. So Israel rebelled against the house of David

David unto this day. 20. And it came to pass when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only. 21. ¶ And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah, with the tribe of Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. 22. But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying, 23. Speak unto Rehoboam the son of Solomon king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, 24. Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house, for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the word of the LORD.

We have here the rending of the kingdom of the ten tribes from the house of David; to effect which,

1. The people were bold and resolute in their revolt. They highly resented the provocation that Rehoboam had given them, were incensed at his menaces, concluded that government would in the progress of it be intolerably grievous, which in the beginning of it was so very haughty; and therefore immediately came to this resolve, one and all, *What portion have we in David?* ver. 16. They speak here very unbecomingly of David, that great benefactor of their nation, calling him *the son of Jesse*, no greater a man than his neighbours. How soon are good men, and their good services to the publick, forgotten! The rashness of their resolution was also much to be blamed; in time, and with prudent management, they might have settled the original contract with Rehoboam, to mutual satisfaction: Had they enquired who gave Rehoboam this advice, and taken a course to remove those evil counsellors from about him, the rupture might have been prevented: otherwise their jealousy for their liberty and property well became that free people. *Israel is not a servant, is not a home-born slave, why should he be spoiled?* Jer. ii. 14. They are willing to be ruled, but not to be ridden; protection draws allegiance, but destruction cannot. No marvel *Israel falls away from the house of David*, ver. 19. if the house of David falls away from the great ends of their advancement, which was to be *ministers of God to them for good*. But thus to rebel against the seed of David, whom God had advanced to the kingdom, and entailed it on the seed, and to set up another king in opposition to that family, was a great sin, see 2 Chron. xiii. 5—3. To this God refers, *Hos. viii. 4. They have set up kings, but not by me*. And it is here mentioned to the praise of the tribe of Judah, that they *followed the house of David*, ver. 17, 20. and for ought appears, they found Rehoboam better than his word, nor did he rule with the rigour which at first he threatened.

2. Rehoboam was imprudent in the farther management of this affair, and more and more infatuated. Having foolishly thrown himself into a quick-sand, he sunk the farther in with plunging to get out. (1.) He was very unadvised in sending Adoram, who was *over the tribute*, to treat with them, ver. 18. The tribute was the thing, and for the sake of that Adoram was the person they most complained of; the very sight of him whose name was odious among them, exasperated them, and made them outrageous: He was one whom they could not so much as give a patient hearing to, but *stoned him to death* in a popular tumult. Rehoboam was now as unhappy in the choice of his ambassador, as before of his counsellors. (2.) Some think he was also unadvised in quitting his ground, and making so much haste to Jerusalem, for thereby he deserted his friends, and gave advantage to his enemies, who *went to their tents* indeed, ver. 16. in disgust, but did not offer to make Jeroboam king till Rehoboam was gone, ver. 20. See how soon this foolish prince went from one extremum to the other. He hectorated and talked big, when he thought all was his own, but sneaked and looked very mean when he saw himself in some danger. It is common for those that are most haughty in their prosperity, to be most abject in adversity.

3. God forbid his attempt to recover what he had lost by the sword. What was done, was of God, who would not suffer, 1. That it should be undone again, as it would be if Rehoboam got the better, and reduced the ten tribes. Nor, 2. That more should be done to the prejudice of the house of David, as would be, if Jeroboam should get the better, and conquer the two tribes. The thing must rest as it is, and therefore God forbids the battle.

(1.) It was brave enough in Rehoboam to design the reducing of the revolvers by force. His courage came to him when he was come to Jerusalem, ver. 21. There he thought himself among his fast friends, who generously adhered to him, and ap-

peared for him. Judah and Benjamin (who feared the Lord and the king, and meddled not with them that were given to change) presently raised an army of an hundred and eighty thousand men, for the recovery of their king's right to the ten tribes, and were resolved to stand by him (as we say) with their lives and fortunes; having either not such cause, or rather not such disposition to complain as the rest had.

(2.) It was more brave in Rehoboam to desist, when God by a prophet ordered him to lay down his arms. He would not lose a kingdom tamely, for then he had been unworthy the title of a prince; and yet he would not contend for it in opposition to God, for then he had been unworthy the title of an Israelite. To proceed in this war, would be not only to *fight against their brethren*, ver. 24. whom they ought to love; but to fight against their God, whom they ought to submit to; *this thing is from me*. These two considerations should reconcile us to our losses, and troubles, that God is the author of them, and our brethren are the instruments of them; let us not therefore meditate revenge.—Rehoboam, and his people, *hearkened to the word of the Lord*, disbanded the army, and acquiesced. Though in human probability, they had a fair prospect of success; for their army was numerous and resolute, Jeroboam's party weak and unsettled: Though it would turn to their reproach among their neighbours, to lose so much of their strength, and never have one push for it, to make a flourish, and do nothing, yet, 1. They regarded the command of God, though sent by a poor prophet. When we know God's mind, we must submit to it, how much soever it crosseth our own mind. 2. They consulted their own interest, concluding, that though they had all advantages, even that of right, on their side, yet they could not prosper, if they fought in disobedience to God: and it was better sit still, than rise up and fall. In the next reign, God allowed them to fight, and gave them victory, 2 Chron. xiii. but not now.

25. ¶ Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein, and went out from thence, and built Peniel. 26. And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: 27. If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, *even* unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. 28. Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. 29. And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in Dan. 30. And this thing became a sin: for the people went *to worship* before the one, *even* unto Dan. 31. And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. 32. And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar (so did he in Beth-el) sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Beth-el the priests of the high places which he had made. 33. So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Beth-el, the fifteenth day of the eighth month, *even* in the month which he had devised of his own heart: and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel, and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.

We have here the beginning of the reign of Jeroboam: He built Shechem first, and then Peniel, beautified and fortified them, and probably had a palace in each of them for himself, ver. 25. the former in Ephraim, the latter in Gad, on the other side Jordan. This was well enough; but he formed another project for the establishing of his kingdom, which was fatal to the interests of religion in it.

1. That which he designed, was by some effectual means to secure those to himself, who had now chosen him their king, and prevent their return to the house of David, ver. 26, 27. It seems, 1. He was jealous of the people, afraid that some time or other they would kill him, and go again to Rehoboam. Many that have been advanced in one tumult, have been kicked off in another. Jeroboam could not put any confidence in the affections of his people, though now they seemed extremum fond of him: for what is got by wrong and usurpation, cannot be enjoyed or kept with any security or satisfaction. 2. He was distrustful of the promise of God; could not take his word, that if he would keep close to his duty, *God would build him a sure house*, chap. xi. 38. but he would contrive ways and means, and sinful ones too, for his own safety. A practical disbelief of God's all-sufficiency, is at the bottom of all our treacherous departures from him.

2. The way he took to do this, was by keeping the people from going up to Jerusalem to worship. That was the place God had chosen to put his name there; Solomon's temple was there, which God had in the sight of all Israel, and in the memory of many now living, taken solemn possession of in a cloud of glory. At the altar, there the priests of the Lord attended; there all Israel were to keep the feasts; and thither they were to bring their sacrifices.

Now, (1.) Jeroboam apprehended, that if the people continued to do this; they would in time return to the house of David, allured by the magnificence both of the court, and of the temple. If they cleave to their old religion, they will go back to their old king. We may suppose, if he had treated with Rehoboam for the safe-conduct of himself and his people, to and from Jerusalem, at the times appointed for their solemn feasts, it would not have been denied him; therefore he fears not their being driven back by force, but their going back to Rehoboam.

(2.) He therefore dissuaded them from going up to Jerusalem, pretending to consult their ease, *it is too much for you to go so far to worship God, ver. 28.* it is a heavy yoke, and it is time to shake it off; *you have gone long enough to Jerusalem.* So some read it; The temple, now you are used to it, doth not appear so glorious and sacred as it did at first; sensible glories wither by degrees in mens estimation. You have freed your selves from other burthens, free your selves from this: Why should we now be tied to one place any more than in Samuel's time.

(3.) He provided for the assistance of their devotion at home. Upon consultation had with some of his politicians, he came to this resolve, To set up two golden calves, as tokens or signs of the divine presence; and persuade the people they had as good stay at home, and offer sacrifice to those, as go to Jerusalem to worship before the ark; and some are so charitable, as to think, they were made to represent the mercy-seat, and the cherubims over the ark: But more probably he learnt it of the Egyptians, in whose land he had sojourned for some time, and who worshipped their god Apis, under the similitude of a bull or calf. 1. He would not be at the charge of building a golden temple, as Solomon had done; two golden calves is the most he can afford. 2. He intended, no doubt, by these to represent, or rather presentiate, not any false god, as Moloch, or Chemoth, but the true God only, the God of Israel, the God that brought them up out of the land of Egypt, as he declares, *ver. 28.* So it was not a violation of the first commandment, but the second. And he chose thus to engage the peoples devotion; because he knew there were many among them so in love with images, that for the sake of the calves they would willingly quit God's temple, where all images were forbidden. 3. He set up two, by degrees, to break people off from the belief of the unity of the godhead, which would pave the way to the polytheism of the Pagans. He set up these two at Dan and Beth-el, one the utmost border of his country northward, the other southwards, as if they were the guardians and protectors of the kingdom. Beth-el lay close to Judah: He set up one there, to tempt those of Rehoboam's subjects over to him, who were inclined to image-worship, in lieu of those of his subjects, that would continue to go to Jerusalem. He set the other at Dan, for the convenience of those that lay most remote, and because Micah's images had been set up there, and great veneration paid to them for many ages, *Judg. xviii. 30.* Beth-el signifies the house of God, which gave some colour to the superstition, but the prophet called it Beth-aven, the house of vanity or iniquity.

(4.) The people complied with him herein, and were fond enough of the novelty, they *went to worship before the one, even unto Dan, ver. 30.* to that at Dan first, because it was first set up; or even to that at Dan, though it lay such a great way off. They that thought it much to go to Jerusalem to worship God according to his own institution, made no difficulty of going twice as far to Dan to worship him according to their own inventions. Or, they are said to go to one of the calves at Dan, because Abijah king of Judah, within twenty years recovered Beth-el, *2 Chron. xiii. 19.* and, it is likely, removed the golden calf, or forbade the use of it, and then they had only that at Dan to go to.—*This became a sin;* and a great sin it was, against the express letter of the second commandment: God had sometimes dispensed with the law concerning worshipping in one place, but never allowed the worship of him by images. Hereby they justified their fathers in making the calf at Horeb, though God had so fully shewn his displeasure against them for it, and threatened to visit for it in the day of visitation, *Exod. xxxii. 34.* So that it was as great a contempt of God's wrath, as it was of his law; and thus they added sin to sin. Bishop Patrick quotes a saying of the Jews, That till Jeroboam's time the Israelites sucked but one calf, but from that time they sucked two.

(5.) Having set up the gods, he fitted up accommodations for them; wherein he varied from the divine appointment, we are here told; which intimates, that in other things he imitated what was done in Judah, *ver. 32.* as well as he could. See how one error multiplied into many.

1. He made a house of high-places, or of altars; one temple at Dan; we may suppose, and another at Beth-el, *ver. 31.* and in each many altars, probably complaining of it as an inconvenience, that in the temple at Jerusalem there was but one. The multiplying of altars passed with some for a piece of devotion, but God, by the prophet, puts another construction upon it, *Hos. viii. 11. Ephraim has made many altars to sin.*

2. He made priests of the lowest of the people; and the lowest of the people were good enough to be priests to his calves, and too good. He made priests *from the extremest parts of the people,* i. e. some out of every corner of the country, whom he ordered to reside among their neighbours, to instruct them in his appointments, and reconcile them to them: Thus were they dispersed as the Levites, but *were not of the sons of Levi.* But the priests of the high places, or altars, he ordered to reside in Beth-el, as the priests at Jerusalem, *ver. 32.* to attend the publick service.

3. The feast of tabernacles which God had appointed on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, he adjourned to the fifteenth day of the eighth month, *ver. 32.* The month which he devised of his own heart, to shew his power in ecclesiastical matters, *ver. 33.*

The passover and pentecost he observed in their proper season, or did not observe them at all, or with little solemnity in comparison with this.

4. He himself assuming a power to make priests, no marvel if he undertook to do the priests work with his own hands, *He offered upon the altar, ver. 32.* and twice it is mentioned, *ver. 33.* as also, that he burnt incense. This was connived at in him, because it was of a piece with the rest of his irregularities; but in king Uzziah, it was immediately punished with the plague of leprosy. He did it himself, to make him look great among the people, and to get the reputation of a devout man; also to grace the solemnity of his new festival, with which it is likely, at this time, he joined the feast of the dedication of his altar.

And thus, 1. Jeroboam sinned himself; yet perhaps, excused himself to the world and his own conscience, with this, that he did not do so ill as Solomon did, who worshipped other gods. 2. He made Israel to sin, drew them off from the worship of God, and entailed idolatry upon their seed. And hereby they were punished for deserting the thrones of the house of David.

The learned Mr. Whiston, in his chronology for the adjusting of the annals of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, supposeth that Jeroboam changed the calculation of the year, and made it to contain but eleven months, and that by those years the reigns of the kings of Israel are measured till Jehu's revolution, and no longer; in which interval, eleven years of the annals of Judah, answer to twelve in those of Israel.

C H A P. XIII.

In the close of the foregoing chapter, we left Jeroboam attending his altar at Beth-el, and there we find him in the beginning of this, when he received a testimony from God against his idolatry and apostasy: This was sent him by a prophet, a man of God, that lived in Judah, who is the principal subject of the story of this chapter, where we are told, 1. What passed between him and the new king. (1.) The prophet threatened Jeroboam's altar, *ver. 1.* 2. and gave him a sign, *ver. 3.* which immediately came to pass, *ver. 5.* (2.) The king threatened the prophet, and was himself made another sign, by the withering of his hand, *ver. 4.* and the restoring of it upon his submission, and the prophet's intercession, *ver. 6.* (3.) The prophet refused the kindness offered him thereupon, *ver. 7—10.* 2. What passed between him and the old prophet. (1.) The old prophet fetched him back by a lie, and gave him entertainment, *ver. 11—19.* (2.) He, for accepting it in disobedience to the divine command, is threatened with death, *ver. 20, 21, 22.* And, 3. The threatening is executed, for he is slain by a lion, *ver. 23, 24.* and buried at Beth-el, *ver. 25—32.* 4. Jeroboam is hardened in his idolatry, *ver. 33, 34.* Thy judgments, Lord, are a great deep.

1. **A**ND behold, there came a man of God out of Judah, by the word of the LORD unto Beth-el: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. 2. And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD, Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and mens bones shall be burnt upon thee. 3. And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out. 4. And it came to pass when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Beth-el, that he put forth his hand from

from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him. 5. The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. 6. And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Intreat now the face of the LORD thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again. And the man of God befought the LORD, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before. 7. And the king said unto the man of God, Come home with me, and refresh thy self, and I will give thee a reward. 8. And the man of God said unto the king, If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread, nor drink water in this place: 9. For so was it charged me by the word of the LORD, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest. 10. So he went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Beth-el.

Here is, 1. A messenger sent to Jeroboam, to signify to him God's displeasure against his idolatry, *ver. 1.* The army of Judah that aimed to ruin him was countermanded, and might not draw a sword against him, *chap. xiii. 24.* but a prophet of Judah is instead thereof sent to reclaim him from his evil way, and is sent in time, while he is but dedicating his altar, before his heart is hardened by the deceitfulness of his sin, for God delights not in sinners death, but would rather they would turn and live.—How bold was the messenger, that durst attack the king in his pride, and interrupt the solemnity he was proud of? They that go on God's errand, must not fear the face of man; they know who will bear them out. How kind was he that sent him to warn Jeroboam of the wrath of God *revealed from heaven* against his *ungodliness* and *unrighteousness*.

2. The message delivered in God's name, not whispered, but cried with a loud voice, noting both the prophet's courage, that he was neither afraid nor ashamed to own it; and his earnestness, that he desired to be heard and heeded by all that were present, who were not a few, on this great occasion.—It is directed not to Jeroboam, or to the people, but to the altar, the stones of which will sooner hear and yield, than they who were mad upon their idols, and deaf to divine calls. Yet in threatening the altar, he threatens the founder and worshippers, to whom it is as dear as their own souls; and who might conclude, If God's wrath fasten upon the lifeless guiltless altar, how shall we escape? That which is foretold concerning the altar, (*ver. 2.*) is, that in process of time, a prince of the house of David, Josiah by name, should pollute this altar by sacrificing the idolatrous priests themselves upon it, and burning the bones of dead men. Let Jeroboam know and be sure, (1.) That the altar he now consecrated should be defecrated. Idolatrous worship will not continue, but the word of the Lord will endure forever. (2.) That the *priests of the high places* he now made, should themselves be made sacrifices to the justice of God, and the first and only sacrifices upon his altar that would be pleasing to him. If the offering be such as is an abomination to God, it will follow of course, that the offerers must themselves fall under his wrath, which will abide upon them, since it is not otherwise transmitted. (3.) That this should be done by a branch of the house of David,—That family which he and his kingdom had despised, and treacherously deserted, should recover so much power as to demolish that altar which he thought to establish; so that right and truth should at length prevail both in civil and sacred matters, notwithstanding the present triumphs of those that were given to change the fear both of God and the king.—It was about three hundred and fifty six years ere this prediction was fulfilled, yet it is spoken of as sure and nigh at hand, for a thousand years with God are but as one day. Nothing more contingent and arbitrary than the giving of names to persons, yet Josiah is here named above three hundred years before he was born. Nothing future is hid from God. There are *names in the book* of the divine prescience, *Phil. iv. 3. names written in heaven.*

3. A sign is given for the confirming of the truth of this prediction, that the altar should be shaken to pieces by an invincible power, and the ashes of the sacrifice scattered, *ver. 3.* which came to pass immediately, *ver. 5.* which was, (1.) A proof that the prophet was sent of God, who *confirmed the word with this sign following*, *Mar. xvi. 20.* (2.) A present indication of God's displeasure against these idolatrous sacrifices. How could the gift be acceptable, when the altar that should sanctify it was an abomination? (3.) It was a reproach to the people, whose hearts were harder than these stones, and rent not under the word of the Lord. (4.) It was a specimen of what should be done to it in the accomplishment of this prophecy, by Josiah; it was now rent, in token of its being then ruined.

4. Jeroboam's hand withered which he stretched out to seize or smite the man of God, *ver. 4.* Instead of trembling at the message, as he might have done, he fell foul on him that

brought it, in defiance of the wrath of which he was warned, and contempt of that grace which sent him the warning. *Rebuke a sinner and he will hate thee*, and do thee a mischief if he can, yet God's prophets must rather expose themselves than betray their trust; he that employs them will protect them, and restrain the wrath of man, as he did Jeroboam's here by withering his hand, so that he could neither hurt the prophet, nor draw it in to help himself. When his hand was stretched out to burn incense to his calves, it was not withered; but when it was stretched out against a prophet, he shall have no use of it till he humble himself. Of all the wickedness of the wicked, there is none more provoking to God than their malicious attempts against his prophets, of whom he hath said, *Touch them not, do them no harm.*—As this was a punishment of Jeroboam, and answering the sin, so it was the deliverance of the prophet. God has many ways of disabling the enemies of his church to execute their mischievous purposes. Jeroboam's inability to pull in his hand, made him a spectacle to all about him, that they might see and fear. If God in justice harden the hearts of sinners, so that the hand they have stretched out in sin they cannot pull in again by repentance, that is a spiritual judgment, represented by this here, and much more dreadful.

5. The sudden healing of the hand that was suddenly dried up, upon his submission, *ver. 6.* That word of God which should have touched his conscience, humbled him not, but this which *touched his bone and his flesh* brings down his proud spirit. He looks for help now, (1.) Not from his calves, but from God only, from his power, and his favour: He wounded, and no hand but his can make whole. (2.) Not by his own sacrifice or incense, but by the prayer and intercession of the prophet, whom he had just now threatened, and aimed to be the death of. The time may come, when those that hate the preaching, would be glad of the prayers, of faithful ministers. Pray to the Lord thy God, faith Jeroboam, thou hast an interest in him, improve it for me. But observe, he doth not desire him to pray that his sin might be pardoned, and his heart changed, only that *his hand might be restored*; thus Pharaoh would have Moses to pray that God would *take away this death only*, *Exod. x. 17.* not this sin. The prophet, as became a man of God, renders good for evil, upbraids not Jeroboam with his impotent malice, nor triumphs in his submission, but immediately addressed himself to God for him. Those only are entitled to the blessing Christ pronounced on the persecuted, that learn of him to pray for their persecutors, *Matt. v. 10, 44.* When the prophet thus honoured God, by shewing himself of a forgiving spirit, God put this farther honour upon him, that at his word he recalled the judgment, and by another miracle healed the withered hand, that by the goodness of God, Jeroboam might be led to repentance, and if he were not broken by the judgment, yet might be melted by the mercy. With both he seemed affected for the present, but the impressions wore off.

6. The prophet's refusal of Jeroboam's kind invitation: In which observe, (1.) That God forbid his messenger to eat or drink in Bethel, *ver. 9.* to shew his detestation of their execrable idolatry and apostasy from God, and to teach us not to have fellowship with the works of darkness, lest we have infection from them, or give encouragement to them. He must not *turn back the same way*, but deliver his message as it were *in transitu*: He shall not seem to be sent on purpose, they were unworthy such a favour, but as if he only called by the way, his spirit being stirred, like Paul's at Athens, as he *passed and saw their devotions*. God would by this command try his prophet, as he did Ezekiel, whether he would not be *rebellious, like that rebellious house*, *Ezek. ii. 8.* (2.) That Jeroboam was so affected with the cure of his hand, that though we read not of his thanksgivings to God for the mercy, or his sending an offering to the altar at Jerusalem in acknowledgment of it, yet he was willing to express his gratitude to the prophet, and pay him for his prayers, *ver. 7.* Favours to the body will make even graceless men seem grateful to good ministers. (3.) That the prophet, though hungry, and weary, perhaps poor, in obedience to the command, refused both the entertainment, and the reward proffered him. He might think his acceptance of it would give him an opportunity of discoursing farther with the king, in order to his effectual reformation now he was convinced, yet he will not think himself wiser than God, but like a faithful careful messenger hastens home when he has done his errand. They have little learned the lesson of self-denial, that cannot forbear one forbidden meal.

II. ¶ Now there dwelt an old prophet in Beth-el, and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Beth-el; the words which he had spoken unto the king, them they told also to their father. 12. And their father said unto them, What way went he? For his sons had seen what way the man of God went, which came from Judah. 13. And he said unto his sons, Saddle me the ass. So they saddled him the ass, and he rode thereon, 14. And went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak; and

and he said unto him, *Art thou the man of God that camest from Judah?* And he said, *I am.* 15. Then he said unto him, Come home with me, and eat bread. 16. And he said, I may not return with thee, nor go in with thee: neither will I eat bread, nor drink water with thee in this place. 17. For it was said to me by the word of the LORD, Thou shalt eat no bread, nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest. 18. He said unto him, *I am a prophet also as thou art,* and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread, and drink water. *But* he lied unto him. 19. So he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water. 20. ¶ And it came to pass as they sat at the table, that the word of the LORD came unto the prophet that brought him back: 21. And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the LORD, and hast not kept the commandment which the LORD thy God commanded thee, 22. But camest back, and hast eaten bread, and drunk water in the place of the which *said* LORD did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers.

The man of God had honestly and bravely refused the king's invitation, though he promised him a reward, yet was over-persuaded by an old prophet, to come back with him, and dine in Beth-el, contrary to the command given him: But here we find how dear his dinner cost him. Observe with wonder,

1. The old prophet's wickedness. I cannot but call him a false prophet, and an ill man, being much easier to believe, that from one of such a bad character, should be extorted a confirmation of what the man of God said, as we find, *ver. 31.* than that a true prophet, and a good man, should tell such a deliberate lie, as he here did, and rather it upon God: *As good trees could never bring forth such corrupt fruit.*—Perhaps, he was trained up among the sons of the prophets, in one of Samuel's colleges, not far off, whence he retained the name of a prophet, but growing worldly and profane, the spirit of prophecy was departed from him. If he had been a good prophet, he would have reproved Jeroboam's idolatry, and not have suffered his sons to attend to his allurements, as it should seem they did.

Now, 1. Whether he had any good design in fetching back the man of God, is not certain. One may hope, he did it in compassion to him, concluding he wanted refreshment, and out of a desire to be better acquainted with him, and more fully to understand his errand, than he could from the report of his sons: yet his sons having told him all that passed, and particularly, that the prophet was forbidden to eat and drink there, which he had openly told Jeroboam; I suppose it was done with an ill design, to draw him into a snare, and so to expose him; for false prophets have ever been the worst enemies to the true prophets, usually aiming to destroy them, but sometimes, as here, to debauch them, and draw them from their duty: Thus they gave the Samaritans a false drink, Amos ii. 12. that they might glory in their fall.

But, 2. It is certain, he took a very ill method to bring him back. When the man of God had told him, *I may not, and therefore I will not return to eat bread with thee,* his resolutions concerning with the divine command, *ver. 16, 17.* he wickedly pretended that he had an order from heaven to fetch him back; he trumped upon him his *pretended* character as a prophet, *I am a prophet also as thou art;* pretended he had a vision of an angel that sent him on this errand, but it was all a lie, it was a banter upon prophecy, and profane in the highest degree. When this old prophet is spoken of, 1 Kings xiii. 18. he is called *the prophet that came out of Samaria*, whereas there was no such place as Samaria till long after. *1 Kings xvi. 24.* therefore I take it he is so called there, though he was of Beth-el, because he was like those who were afterwards *the prophets of Samaria*, who *used* God's name *in vain.* *Jer. xliii. 13.*

2. The good prophet's weakness, in suffering himself to be imposed upon by the other: *He went back with him,* *ver. 19.* he that had resolution enough to refuse the invitation of the king, was persuaded him a reward, could not resist the insinuations of one that pretended to be a prophet; good people are more in danger of being drawn from their duty, by the plausible pretences of the evil, and flatterer, than by external inducements, we be therefore used to *strive against flesh and blood,* and not *against men.*

3. The proceedings of divine justice hereupon; and here we may well wonder, both that the wicked prophet, who told the lie, and the old prophet, were punished; while the holy man of God, that was drawn by him into sin, was suddenly and se-

verely punished for it; what shall we make of this! the judgments of God are unfathomable; *the deceived and the deceiver are his,* and he *giveth not account of any of his matters;* certainly there must be a judgment to come, when these things will be called over again, and when those that sinned most, and suffered least in this world, will receive according to their works. 1. The message delivered to the man of God was strange, his crime is recited, *ver. 21, 22.* it was, in one word, disobedience to an express command, judgment is given upon it, *Thy carcase shall not come to the sepulchre of thy fathers,* i. e. Thou shalt never reach thy own house, but shalt be a carcase quickly, nor shall thy dead body be brought to the place of thy fathers' sepulchres to be interred. 2. Yet it was more strange, that the old prophet himself should be the messenger, of this we can give no account, but that God would have it so, as he spake to Balaam by his ass, and read Saul his doom by the devil in Samuel's likeness; we may think God designed hereby, (1.) To startle the lying prophet, and make him sensible of his sin, the message could not but affect him the more, when he himself had the delivering of it, and had so strong an impression made upon his spirit by it, that he cried out as one in an agony, *ver. 21.* he had reason to think, if he must die for his disobedience in a small matter, who sinned by surprise, of how much sorer punishment he should be thought worthy, who had belied an angel of God, and cheated a man of God by a deliberate forgery. *If this were done to the green tree, what should be done to the dry?* Perhaps, it had a good effect upon him; those who preach God's wrath to others, have hard hearts indeed, if they fear it not themselves. —2. To put the greater mortification upon the prophet that was deceived, and to shew what they must expect who hearken to the great deceiver; they that yield to him as a tempter, will be terrified by him as a tormentor, whom he now fawns upon, he will afterwards fly upon, and whom he draws into sin, he will do what he can to drive to despair.

23. ¶ And it came to pass after he had eaten bread, and after he had drunk, that he saddled for him the ass, to *sow*, for the prophet whom he had brought back. 24. And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him: and his carcase was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it, the lion also stood by the carcase. 25. And behold, men passed by, and saw the carcase cast in the way, and the lion standing by the carcase: and they came and told it in the city where the old prophet dwelt. 26. And when the prophet that brought him back from the way, heard thereof, he said; It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the LORD: therefore the LORD hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him and slain him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake unto him. 27. And he spake to his sons, saying, Saddle me the ass. And they saddled him. 28. And he went and found his carcase cast in the way, and the ass and the lion standing by the carcase: the lion had not eaten the carcase, nor torn the ass. 29. And the prophet took up the carcase of the man of God, and laid it upon the ass, and brought it back: and the old prophet came to the city, to mourn, and to bury him. 30. And he laid his carcase in his own grave, and they mourned over him, saying, Alas my brother. 31. And it came to pass after he had buried him, that he spake to his sons, saying, When I am dead, then bury me in the sepulchre wherein the man of God is buried, lay my bones beside his bones. 32. For the saying which he cried by the word of the LORD against the altar in Beth-el, and against all the houses of the high places which are in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass. 33. ¶ After this thing, Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people, priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. 34. And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth.

Here is, 1. The death of the deceived disobedient prophet. The old prophet that had deceived him, as if he would make him some amends for the wrong he had done him, or help to prevent the mischief threatened him, furnished him with an ass to ride home on, but by the way a lion set upon him and killed him, *ver. 23, 24.* he did but turn back to refresh himself when he was so hungry, and behold he must die for it, to allude to that of Jonathan, 1 Sam. xiv. 45. But we must consider, (1.) That his offence was great, and it would by no means justify him, that he was drawn into it by a lie; he could not be so certain of the commandment sent by another, as he was of the command given

given to himself, nor had he any ground to think that the command should be recalled when the reason of it remained in force, which was, that he might testify his detestation of the wickedness of that place.—He had great reason to suspect the honesty of this old prophet, who did not himself bear his testimony, nor did God think fit to make use of him as a witness against the idolatry of the city he lived in; however, he should have taken time to beg direction from God, and not have complied so soon: Did he think this old prophet's house safer to eat in than other houses in Bethel, when God had forbidden him to eat in any? That was to refine upon the command, and make himself wiser than God. Did he think to excuse himself, that he was hungry, had he never read, that *man lives not by bread alone*? (2.) That his death was for the glory of God, for by this it appeared, (1.) That nothing is more provoking to him than disobedience to an express command, though in a small matter, which makes his proceedings against our first parents for eating forbidden fruit the more accountable.—(2.) That God is displeased at the sins of his own people, and no man shall be protected in disobedience by the sanctity of his profession, the dignity of his office, the nearness to God, or any good services he has done for him. Perhaps, God by this intended, in a way of righteous judgment, to harden Jeroboam's heart, since he was not reformed by the withering of his hand, for he would be apt to make an ill use of it, and to say, the prophet was well enough served for meddling with his altar, he had better have stayed at home; nay, he would say, providence had punished him for his insolence, and the lion had done that which his withered hand might not do; however, by this he intended to warn all those whom he employs strictly to observe their orders at their peril.

2. The wonderful preservation of his dead body, which was a token of God's mercy remembered in the midst of wrath; the lion that gently strangled him, or tore him, did not devour his dead body, nor so much as tear the ass, *ver. 24, 25, 28.* nay, which was more, he did not set upon the travellers that passed by and saw it, nor upon the old prophet (who had reason enough to fear it) when he came to take up the corps, his commission was to kill the prophet, hitherto he shall go, but no further; thus God shewed, that though he was angry with him, his anger was turned away, and the punishment went *no further than death.*

3. The care which the old prophet took of his burial, when he heard of the unusual accident, he concluded it was *the man of God who was disobedient* to his master, (and whose fault was that?) *Therefore the Lord has delivered him to the lion,* *ver. 26.* It had well become him to have asked why the lion was not sent against him and his house rather than against the good man, whom he had cheated. He *took up the corps,* *ver. 29.* If there were any truth in the vulgar opinion, sure the corps bled afresh when he touched it, for he was in effect the murderer, and it was but a poor reparation for the injury, to interr the dead body; perhaps when he cheated him into his ruin, he intended to laugh at him, yet now his conscience so far relents that he weeps over him, and, like Joab at Abner's funeral, is compelled to be a mourner for him whom he had been the death of; they said, *Alas my brother,* *ver. 30.* The case was indeed very piteous, that so good a man, so faithful a prophet, and so bold in God's cause, should for one offence die as a criminal, while an old lying prophet lives at ease, and an idolatrous prince in pomp and power: *Thy way, O God, is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters.* We cannot judge of men by their sufferings, nor of sins by their present punishments; with some the flesh is destroyed that the spirit may be saved, while with others the flesh is pampered that the soul may ripen for hell.

4. The charge which the old prophet gave his sons concerning his own burial, that they should be sure to bury him in the same grave where the man of God was buried, *ver. 31.* *Lay my bones beside his bones,* close by them, as near as may be, so that my dust may mingle with his; though he was a lying prophet yet he desired to *die the death of a true prophet;* gather not my soul with the sinners of Bethel, but with this man of God.—The reason he gives is, because *what he cried against the altar of Bethel,* that mens bones should be burnt upon it, *shall surely come to pass,* *ver. 32.* Thus, 1. He ratifies the prediction, that *out of the mouth of two witnesses,* (and one of them such a one as Paul quotes, *Titus i. 12. one of themselves, even a prophet of their own*) the word might be established, if possible to convince and reclaim Jeroboam. 2. He doth honour to the deceased prophet, as one whose word would not fall to the ground though he did; ministers die, die untimely it may be, but the word of the Lord endures for ever, and doth not die with them. 3. He consults his own interest, it was foretold that mens bones should be burnt upon Jeroboam's altar, lay mine (saith he) close to his, and then they will not be disturbed; and it was accordingly their security, as we find, *2 Kings xxiii. 18.* Sleeping and waking, living and dying, it is safe being in good company.—No mention is made here of the inscription on the prophet's tomb, but it is spoken of, *2 Kings xxiii. 17.* where Josiah asks, *What title is that?* and is told, *It is the sepulchre of the man of God that came from Judah, who proclaimed these things which thou hast done; so that the epitaph upon the*

prophet's grave preserved the remembrance of his prophecy, and was a standing testimony against the idolatries of Bethel, which it would not have been, so remarkably, if he had died and been buried elsewhere; the cities of Israel are here called cities of Samaria, though that name was not yet known; for however the old prophet spoke, the inspired historian wrote in the language of his own time.

5. The obstinacy of Jeroboam in his idolatry, *ver. 33.* *he returned not from his evil way;* some hand was found that durst repair the altar God had rent, and then Jeroboam offered sacrifice on it again, and the more boldly because the prophet, who disturbed him before, was in his grave, (*Rev. xi. 10.*) and because the prophecy was for a great while to come.—Various methods had been used to reclaim him, but neither threats nor signs, neither judgments nor mercies wrought upon him, so strangely was he wedded to his calves; he did not reform, no not his priesthood, but whoever would he filled his hand, and made him priest, though never so illiterate or immoral, and of what tribe soever, *and this became sin,* i. e. a snare first, and then a ruin to Jeroboam's house, to cut it off, *ver. 34.* Note, The diminution, disquiet, and desolation of families, is the fruit of sin; he promised himself that the calves would secure the crown to his family, but it proved they lost it, and sunk his family: Those betray themselves that think by any sin to support themselves.

C H A P. XIV.

The kingdom being divided into that of Judah and that of Israel, we must henceforward in these books of Kings expect and attend their separate history, the succession of their kings, and the affairs of their kingdoms accounted for distinctly. In this chapter we have, (1.) The prophecy of the destruction of Jeroboam's house, ver. 7—16. The sickness of his child was the occasion of it, ver. 1—6. and the death of his child the earnest of it, ver. 17, 18. together with the conclusion of his reign, ver. 19, 20. (2.) The history of the declension and diminution of Rehoboam's house and his kingdom, ver. 21—28. and the conclusion of his reign, ver. 29—31. In both which we may read the mischievous consequences of sin, and the calamities it brings on kingdoms and families.

1. **A**T that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam fell sick. 2. And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thy self, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam: and get thee to Shiloh; behold, there is Ahijah the prophet, which told me that I should be king over this people. 3. And take with thee ten loaves and cracknels, and a cruse of honey, and go to him: he shall tell thee what shall become of the child. 4. And Jeroboam's wife did so, and arose, and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah: but Ahijah could not see, for his eyes were set by reason of his age. 5. ¶ And the LORD said unto Ahijah, Behold, the wife of Jeroboam cometh to ask a thing of thee for her son, for he is sick: thus and thus shalt thou say unto her for it shall be when she cometh in, that she shall feign her self to be another woman. 6. And it was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam, why feignest thou thy self to be another? for I am sent to thee with heavy tidings.

How Jeroboam persisted in his contempt of God and religion we read in the close of the foregoing chapter, now here we are told how God proceeded in his controversy with him, for when God judgeth he will overcome, and sinners shall either bend or break before him.

1. His child fell sick, *ver. 1.* It is probable he was his eldest son, and heir apparent to the crown, for at his death all the kingdom went into mourning for him, *ver. 13.*—Neither his dignity as a prince, nor his age as a young prince, nor his interest in heaven as a pious prince, could exempt him from sickness, dangerous sickness; let none be secure of the continuance of their health, but improve it while it continues for the best purposes: Lord, behold he whom thou lovest, thy favourite, he whom Israel loves, their darling, is sick; at that time when Jeroboam prostituted and profaned the priesthood, *chap. xiii. 31.* his child sickned; when sickness comes into our families, we should enquire whether there be not some particular sin harboured in our houses, which the affliction is sent to convince us of, and reclaim us from.

2. He sent his wife in disguise to enquire of Ahijah the prophet *what should become of the child,* *ver. 2, 3.* the sickness of of his child touched him in a tender part, the withering of this branch of his family would perhaps be as fore an affliction to him as the withering of that branch of his body, *chap. xiii. 4.* such is the force of natural affection; our children are our selves but once removed.

Now, (1.) Jeroboam's great desire under this affliction is to know *what shall become of the child,* whether he will live or die.

1. It had been more prudent, if he had desired to know what means they should use for the recovery of the child, what they should give him, and what they should do to him; but by this instance, and that of Ahaziah, 2 Kings i. 2. and Benhadad, 2 Kings viii. 8. it should seem, they had then such a foolish notion of fatality, as took them off from all use of means, for if they were sure the patient would live, they thought means needless; if he would die, they thought them useless, not considering that duty is ours, events are God's, and that he that ordained the end, ordained the means; why should a prophet be desired to shew that which a little time will shew? 2. It had been more pious, if he had desired to know wherefore God contended with him, had begged the prophet's prayers, and cast away his idols from him, then the child might have been restored to him, as his hand was; but most people would rather be told their fortune, than told their faults, or their duty.

(2.) That he might know the child's doom, he sent to Ahijah the prophet, who lived obscure and neglected in Shiloh, blind for age, yet still blest with the visions of the Almighty; which need not bodily eyes, but are rather favoured by the want of them, the eyes of the mind being then most intent, and least diverted. — Jeroboam sent not to him for advice about the setting up of his calves, or the consecrating of his priests, but has recourse to him in his distress, when the gods he served could give him no relief; *Lord, in trouble have they visited thee*, who before slighted thee; some have by sickness been minded of their forgotten ministers and praying friends; he sends to Ahijah, because he had told him he should be king, ver. 2. He was once the messenger of good tidings, sure he will be so again; those that by sin unqualify themselves for comfort, and yet expect their ministers, because they are good men, should speak peace and comfort to them, greatly wrong both themselves and their ministers.

(3.) He sent his wife to enquire of the prophet, because she could best put the question without naming names, or making any other description but this, Sir, I have a son ill, will he recover or not? The heart of her husband safely trusted in her, that she would be faithful both in delivering the message, and bringing him the answer; and it seems, there were none of all his counsellors in whom he could repose such a confidence, otherwise the sick child could very ill have spared her, for mothers are the best nurses, and it had been much fitter for her to have stayed at home to tend him, than go to Shiloh to enquire what would become of him. — If she go, 1. She must go *incognito*, must disguise herself, change her dress, cover her face, and go by another name, not only to conceal herself from her own court and the country through which she past, as if it were below her quality to go upon such an errand, and what she had reason to be ashamed of, as Nicodemus that came to Jesus by night, whereas it is no disparagement to the greatest to attend God's prophets; but also to conceal herself from the prophet himself, that he might only answer her question concerning her son, and not enter upon the unpleasant subject of her husband's defection; thus some people love to prescribe to their ministers, limit them to smooth things, and care not for having the *whole counsel of God declared* to them, lest it prove to prophesy *no good concerning them, but evil*: But what a strange notion had Jeroboam of God's prophet, that he believed he could and would certainly tell what *would become of the child*, and yet either could not or would not discover who was the mother; could he see into the thick darkness of futurity, and yet not see through the thin veil of this disguise? Did he think the God of Israel like his calves, just what he pleased? *Be not deceived, God is not mocked*.

3. God gave Ahijah notice of the approach of Jeroboam's wife, and that she came in disguise, and full instructions what to say to her, ver. 5. which enabled him as she came in at the door, to call her by her name, to her great surprize, and so to discover to all about him who she was, ver. 6. *Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam, why feignest thou thyself to be another?* He had no regard either, 1. To her rank, she was a queen, but what was that to him, who had a message to deliver her immediately from God, before whom all the children of men stand upon the same level? Nor, 2. To her present; it was usual for those who consulted prophets, to bring them tokens of respect, which they accepted, and yet were no hirelings; she brought him a handsome country present, ver. 3. but he did not think himself obliged by that to give her any finer language, than the nature of his message required. Nor, 3. To her industrious concealment of herself, it is a piece of civility, not to take notice of those who desire not to be taken notice of, but the prophet was no courtier, nor gave flattering titles; plain dealing is best, and she shall know at the first word what she has to trust to, *I am sent to thee with heavy tidings*. Note, Those who think by their disguises to hide themselves from God, will be wretchedly confounded, when they find themselves disappointed in the day of discovery; sinners now appear in the garb of saints, and are taken to be so, but how will they blush and tremble, when they find themselves stripped of their false colours, and are called by their own name; go out, thou treacherous false-hearted hypocrite, *I never knew thee, why feignest thou thyself to be another?* Tidings of a portion with

hypocrites will be heavy tidings; God will judge men according to what they are, not according to what they seem.

7. Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, 8. And rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee; and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do *that only which was right in mine eyes*, 9. But hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back: 10. Therefore behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as a man taketh away dung till it be all gone. 11. Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city, shall the dogs eat: and him that dieth in the field, shall the fowls of the air eat: for the LORD hath spoken it. 12. Arise thou therefore, get thee to thine own house: and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die. 13. And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found *some* good thing toward the LORD God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam. 14. Moreover the LORD shall raise him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam that day: but what? even now. 15. For the LORD shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the LORD to anger. 16. And he shall give Israel up, because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin. 17. ¶ And Jeroboam's wife arose, and departed, and came to Tirzah: and when she came to the threshold of the door, the child died, 18. And they buried him, and all Israel mourned for him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by the hand of his servant Ahijah the prophet. 19. And the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred, and how he reigned, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. 20. And the days which Jeroboam reigned, were two and twenty years: and he slept with his fathers, and Nadab his son reigned in his stead.

When those that set up idols, and keep them up, go to enquire of the Lord, he determines to answer them, not according to the pretensions of their enquiry, but *according to the multitude of their idols*, Ezek. xiv. 4. so Jeroboam is answered here; he prevented her enquiry concerning the child, and foretels the ruin of Jeroboam's house for the wickedness of it; no one else durst have carried such a message, a servant would have smothered it, but his own wife cannot be suspected of ill will to him.

1. God calls himself the *Lord God of Israel*, this Israel had forsaken God, God had not cast them off, nor given them a bill of divorce for their whoredoms; he is Israel's God, and therefore will take vengeance on him who did them the greatest mischief he could do them, debauched them, and drew them away from him.

2. He upbraids Jeroboam with the great favour he had bestowed upon him, in making him king, exalting him from among the people, the common people, to be prince over God's chosen Israel, and taking the kingdom *from the house of David*, to bestow it upon him; whether we keep an account of God's mercies to us or no, he doth, and will set even them in order before us, if we be ungrateful, to our greater confusion; otherwise he gives and upbraids not.

3. He chargeth him with his impiety and apostasy, and his idolatry particularly. *Thou hast done evil above all that were before thee*, ver. 9. Saul, that was rejected, never worshipped idols; Solomon did it but occasionally, in his dotage, and never made Israel to sin; Jeroboam's calves, though pretended to be set up in honour of the God of Israel, that brought them up out of Egypt, yet are here called other gods, or strange gods, because in them he worshipped God, as the heathen worshipped their strange gods; because by them he *changeth the truth of God into a lie*, and represented him as altogether other than he is; and because many of the ignorant worshippers terminated their devotion in the image, and did not at all regard the God of Israel. Though

Though they were calves of gold, the richness of the metal was so far from making them acceptable to God, that they provoked him to anger, designedly affronted him, under colour of pleasing him.—In doing this, 1. He had not set David before him, *ver. 8. Thou hast not been as my servant David*, who though he had his faults, and some bad ones, yet he never forsook the worship of God, nor grew loose or cold to that; his faithful adherence to that, gained him this honourable character, that he followed God with all his heart, and herein he was proposed for an example to all his successors; those did not do well, that did not do like David. 2. He had not set God before him, but *ver. 9. Thou hast cast me behind thy back, my law, my fear; neglected me, forgotten me, and preferred thy policies before my precepts.*

4. He foretels the utter ruin of Jeroboam's house, *ver. 10, 11.* He thought by his idolatry to establish his government, and by that he not only lost it, but brought destruction upon his family; universal destruction of all the males, whether shut up or left, married or unmarried: shameful destruction, they shall be taken away as dung, which is lothesome, and which men are glad to be rid of. He worshipped dunghill deities, and God removed his family as a great dunghill; and noble royal families, if wicked, are no better in God's account. Unusual destruction, their very dead bodies should be meat for the dogs in the street, or the birds of prey in the field, *ver. 11.* Thus evil pursues sinners. See this fulfilled, *chap. xv. 29.*

5. He foretels the immediate death of the child that was now sick, *ver. 12, 13.* 1. In mercy to him, lest if he live he be infected with the sin, and so involved in the ruin of his father's house. Observe the character given of him, *In him was found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam.* He only had an affection for the true worship of God, and disliked the worship of the calves. Note, (1.) Those are good, in whom are good things towards the Lord God of Israel. Good inclinations, good intentions; good desires towards him. (2.) Where there is but some good thing of that kind, it will be found; God that seeks it sees it, be it never so little, and is pleased with it. (3.) A little grace goes a great way with great folks. It is so rare to find princes well affected to religion, that when they are so, they are worthy of double honour. (4.) Pious dispositions are in a peculiar manner amiable and acceptable, when they are found in those that are young. The divine image in miniature, has a peculiar beauty and lustre in it. (5.) Those that are good in bad times and places, shine very bright in the eyes of God. A good child in the house of Jeroboam, is a miracle of divine grace: to be there untainted, is like being in the fiery furnace unhurt, unsinged.—Observe the care taken of him: he only of all Jeroboam's family shall die in honour; shall be buried, and shall be lamented, as one that lived desired. Note, Those that are distinguished by the divine grace, shall be distinguished by the divine providence.—This hopeful child dies first of all the family, for God often takes them soonest whom he loves best; heaven is the fittest place for them, this earth is not worthy of them. 2. In wrath to the family. It was a sign the family would be ruined, when he was taken by whom it might have been reformed. The righteous are removed from the evil to come in this world, to the good to come in a better world.—It is an ill omen to a family, when the best in it are buried out of it; when what was valuable is picked out, the rest is for the fire. It is likewise a present affliction to the family and kingdom, by which both ought to have been bettered. It aggravated it to the poor mother, that she should not reach home time enough to see her child alive. *When thy feet enter into the city, just then the child shall die.* This was to be a sign to her of the accomplishment of the rest of the threatnings, as *1 Sam. ii. 34.*

6. He foretels the setting up of another family to rule over Israel, *ver. 14.* This was fulfilled in Baasha of Issachar, who conspired against Nadab the son of Jeroboam, in the second year of his reign, murdered him and all his family. *But what? even now.* What do I speak of it as a thing at a distance? It is at the door, it shall be done, *even now.* Sometimes God makes quick work with sinners; he did so with the house of Jeroboam: It was not twenty-four years from his first elevation, to the final extirpation of his family.

7. He foretels the judgments which should come upon the people of Israel, for conforming to the worship which Jeroboam had established. *If the blind lead the blind*, both the blind leaders, and the blind followers, shall fall into the ditch. It is here foretold, *ver. 15.* (1.) that they should never be easy, nor right-ly settled in their land, but continually shaken like a reed in the water. After they left the house of David, the government never continued long in one family, but one undermined and destroyed another, which must needs occasion great disorders and disturbances among the people. (2.) That they should ere long be totally expelled out of their land, that good land, and given up to ruin, *ver. 16.* This was fulfilled in the captivity of the ten tribes, by the king of Assyria. Families and kingdoms are ruined by sin, ruined by the wickedness of the heads of them. *Jeroboam did sin, and made Israel to sin.* If great men

do wickedly, they involve many others both in the guilt, and in the snare, multitudes follow their pernicious ways: They go to hell with a long train, and their condemnation will be more intolerable, who must answer not only for their own sins, but for the sins which others have been drawn into, and kept in by their influence.

Jeroboam's wife has nothing to say against the word of the Lord, but home she goes with a heavy heart to their house in Tirzah, a sweet delightful place; so the name signifies, famed for its beauty, *Cant. vi. 4.* But death cannot be shut out from it, which will stain its beauty, and embitter all its delights. Hither she came, and here we leave her attending the funeral of her son, and expecting the fate of her family.

(1.) *The child died*, *ver. 17.* and justly did all Israel mourn, not only for the loss of so hopeful a prince, whom they were not worthy of, but because his death plucked up the flood-gates, and made a breach, at which an inundation of judgments broke in.

(2.) Jeroboam himself died soon after, *ver. 20.* It is said *2 Chron. xiii. 20.* The Lord struck him with some sore disease, so that he died miserably, when he had reigned twenty two years; and left his crown to a son who lost it, and his life too, and all the lives of his family; within ten years after. For a farther account of him, the reader is referred to the annals of his reign, drawn up by his own secretaries, or to the publick records, like those in the Tower, called here, The book or register of the chronicles of the kings of Israel, to which then recourse might be had; but not being divinely inspired, they are long since lost.

21. And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah: Rehoboam was forty and one years old, when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there: and his mothers name was Naamah, an Ammonitess. 22. And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done. 23. For they also built them high places, and images, and groves on every high hill, and under every green tree. 24. And there were also sodomites in the land, and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. 25. ¶ And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem: 26. And he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the kings house, he even took away all; and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made. 27. And king Rehoboam made in their stead brasen shields, and committed them unto the hands of the chief of the guard, which kept the door of the kings house. 28. And it was so, when the king went into the house of the LORD, that the guard bare them, and brought them back into the guard chamber. 29. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 30. And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days. 31. And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David, and his mothers name was Naamah an Ammonitess. And Abijam his son reigned in his stead.

Judah's story and Israel's are intermixt in this book: Jeroboam out-lived Rehoboam four or five years, yet his history is dispatched first, that the account of Rehoboam's reign may be laid together; and a sad account it is.

1. Here is no good said of the king. All the account we have of him here, is, 1. That he was forty one years old when he began to reign, and by that reckoning, he was born in the last year of David, and had his education, and the forming of his mind, in the best days of Solomon; yet he lived not up to it. Solomon's defection at last did more to corrupt him, than his wisdom and devotion had done to principle him well. 2. That he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city where God put his name, where he had opportunity enough to know his duty, if he had but had a heart to do it. 3. That his mother was Naamah an Ammonitess, this is twice mentioned, *ver. 21, 31.* It was strange, David would marry his son Solomon to an Ammonitess, (for it was done while he lived) but it is likely Solomon was in love with her, because she was Naamah, a beauty, so it signifies, and his father was lothe to cross him, but it proved to have a very ill influence upon posterity. Probably, she was daughter to Shobi the Ammonite, who was kin to David, *2 Sam.*

2 Sam. xvii. 27. and David was too willing to requite him by matching his son into his family. None can imagine how lasting, and how fatal the consequences may be, of being unequally yoked with unbelievers. 4. That he had continual war with Jeroboam, ver. 30. which could not but be a perpetual uneasiness to him. 5. That when he had reigned but seventeen years, he died, and left his throne to his son. His father, and grandfather, and grandson that reigned well, reigned long, forty years apiece, but sin often shortens mens lives and comforts.

2. Here is a great deal of ill said of the kingdom, both as to their character, and their condition.

(1.) See here how wicked and profane they were. It is a most sad account that is here given of their apostasy from God, ver. 22, 23, 24. Judah, the only professing people God had in the world, *did evil in his sight*, in contempt and defiance of him, and the tokens of his special presence with them; *they provoked him to jealousy*, as the adulterous wife provokes her husband, by breaking the marriage covenant. Their fathers had been bad enough, especially in the times of the judges, but they did abominable things *above all that their fathers had done*. The magnificence of their temple, the pomp of their priesthood, and all the secular advantages with which their religion was attended, could not prevail to keep them tight to it; nothing less than the *pouring out of the Spirit from on high*, will keep God's Israel in their allegiance to him.—The account here given of the wickedness of the Jews, agrees with that which the apostle gives of the wickedness of the Gentile world, Rom. i. 21, 24. so that both *Jew and Gentile are all alike under sin*, Rom. iii. 9. 1. They became *vain in their imaginations* concerning God, and *changed his glory into an image*, for they built them *high places, images and groves*, ver. 23. profaning God's name, by affixing it to their images, and ordinances, by serving their idols with them. They foolishly fancied that they exalted God, when they worshipped him on high hills; and pleased him, when they worshipped him under the pleasant shadow of green trees. 2. They were given up to vile affections, as those idolaters, Rom. i. 26, 27. for there were *sodomites in the land*, ver. 24. *Men with men working that which is unseemly*, and not to be thought of, much less mentioned, without abhorrence and indignation. They dishonoured God by one sin, and then God left them to dishonour themselves by another. They profaned the privileges of a holy nation, therefore God gave them up to their own hearts lusts, to imitate the abominations of the accursed Canaanites, and herein the Lord was righteous. And when they did *like them that were cast out*, how could they expect any other but to be cast out like them?

(2.) See here how weak and poor they were; and this was the consequent of the former: Sin exposeth, impoverisheth, and weakneth any people. Shishak king of Egypt came against them, and so far, either by force or surrender, made himself master of Jerusalem itself, that he took away the treasures both of the temple, and of the exchequer of the house of the Lord, and of the king's house, which David and Solomon had amassed, ver. 25, 26. Those, it is likely, tempted him to make this descent; and, to save the rest, Rehoboam perhaps tamely surrendered them, as Ahab chap. xx. 4. He also took away the golden shields, that were made but in his father's time, ver. 26. these the king of Egypt carried off as trophies of his victory; and instead of them, Rehoboam made brasen shields, which the life-guard carried before him, when he went to church in state, ver. 27, 28. This was an emblem of the diminution of his glory. Sin makes the gold become dim, changes the most fine gold, and turns it into brass. We commend Rehoboam for going to the house of the Lord, perhaps the oftner for the rebuke he had been under, and do not condemn him for going in pomp. Great men should honour God with their honour, and then they are themselves most honoured by it.

C H A P. XV.

In this chapter we have an abstract of the history, (1.) Of two of the kings of Judah. 1. Abijam, the days of whose reign were few and evil, ver. 1—3. 2. Afa, who reigned well and long, ver. 9—24. (2.) Of two of the kings of Israel, Nadab the son of Jeroboam, and Baasha the destroyer of Jeroboam's house, ver. 25—34.

1. **N**OW in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam the son of Nebat, reigned Abijam over Judah. 2. Three years reigned he in Jerusalem: and his mothers name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom. 3. And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father. 4. Nevertheless, for Davids sake did the LORD his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem: 5. Because David did *that which was right in the eyes of the LORD*,

and turned not aside from any *thing* that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. 6. And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life. 7. Now the rest of the acts of Abijah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. 8. And Abijam slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David: and Afa his son reigned in his stead.

We have here a short account of the short reign of Abijam the son of Rehoboam king of Judah. He makes a better figure, 2 Chron. xiii. where we have an account of his war with Jeroboam, the speech he made before the armies engaged, and the wonderful victory he obtained by the help of God, than he doth here: There he is called Abijah, *My Father is the Lord*, because no wickedness is there laid to his charge: But here, where we are told of his faults, *Jah*, the name of God, is in disgrace to him, taken away from his name, and he is called Abijam, Jer. xxii. 24.

Little particular is related concerning him. 1. He began his reign in the beginning of Jeroboam's eighteenth year, for Rehoboam reigned but seventeen, chap. xiv. 21. Jeroboam indeed survived Rehoboam, but Rehoboam's Abijah lived to succeed him, and to be a terror to Jeroboam, while Jeroboam's Abijah, whom we read of chap. xiv. 1. died before him. 2. He reigned but three years, scarce that, for he died before the end of Jeroboam's twentieth year, ver. 9. Being made proud and secure by his great victory over Jeroboam, 2 Chron. xiii. 21. God cut him off to make way for his son Afa, who would be a better man. 3. *His mother's name was Maachah the daughter of Absalom*, viz. Absalom, David's son, as I am the rather inclined to think, because two other of Rehoboam's wives were his near relations, 2 Chron. xi. 18. one the daughter of Jerimoth, David's son; and another the daughter of Eliab, David's brother. He took warning by his father, not to marry strangers; yet thought it below him to marry his subjects, except they were of the royal family. 4. That he carried on his father's wars with Jeroboam. As there was continual war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, not set battles, those were forbidden, chap. xii. 24. but frequent rencounters, especially upon the borders, one making incursions and reprisals on the other; so there was between Abijam and Jeroboam, ver. 7. till Jeroboam with a great army invaded him, and then Abijam not being forbidden to act in his own defence, routed him, and weakned him, that he quieted him the rest of his reign, 2 Chron. xiii. 20.

But in general we are here told, 1. That he was not like David, had no hearty affection for the ordinances of God; though to serve his purpose against Jeroboam, he pleaded his possession of the temple and priesthood, as that which he valued himself upon, 2 Chron. xiii. 10, 11, 12. Many boast of their profession of godliness, that are strangers to the power of it; and plead the truth of their religion, who yet are not true to it. *His heart was not perfect with the Lord his God*; he seemed to have zeal, but he wanted sincerity; he began pretty well, but he fell off, and *walked in all the sins of his father*, followed his bad example, though he had seen the ill consequences of it. He that was all his days in war, ought to have been so wise, as to make and keep his peace with God, and not to make him his enemy, especially having found him so good a friend in his war with Jeroboam, 2 Chron. xiii. 18. *Let favour be shewed the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness*, Isa. xxvi. 10. 2. That yet it was for David's sake that he was advanced, and continued upon the throne; it was *for his sake*, ver. 4, 5. that God thus *set up his son after him*; not for his own sake, or for the sake of his father, whose steps he trod in, but *for the sake of David*, whose example he would not follow. Note, It aggravates the sin of a degenerate seed, that they fare the better for the piety of their ancestors, and owe their blessings to it, and yet will not imitate it. They stand upon that bottom, and yet despise it, and trample upon it, and unreasonably ridicule and oppose that which they enjoy the benefit of. The kingdom of Judah was supported, (1.) That David might have a lamp, pursuant to the divine ordination of a lamp for his anointed, Psal. cxxxii. 17. (2.) That Jerusalem might be established; not only that the honours put upon it in David's and Solomon's time might be preserved to it, but that it might be reserved to the honours designed for it in after-times. The character here given of David is very great, *that he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord*, but the exception very remarkable, *save only in the matter of Uriah*, including both his murder, and the debauching of his wife: That was a bad matter; it was a remaining blot upon his name, a bar in his escutcheon, and the reproach of it was not wiped away, though the guilt was. David was guilty of other faults, but they were nothing in comparison with that; yet even that being repented of, though it be mentioned for warning to others, did not prevail to throw them out of covenant, nor to cut off the entail of the promise upon his seed.

9. ¶ And in the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel, reigned Aſa over Judah. 10. And forty and one years reigned he in Jeruſalem: and his mothers name was Maachah, the daughter of Abiſhalom. 11. And Aſa did *that which was* right in the eyes of the LORD, as did David his father. 12. And he took away the ſodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made. 13. And alſo Maachah his mother, even her he removed from *being* queen, becauſe ſhe had made an idol in a grove; and Aſa deſtroyed her idol, and burnt it by the brook Kidron. 14. But the high places were not removed: nevertheleſs, Aſa his heart was perfect with the LORD all his days. 15. And he brought in the things which his father had dedicated, and the things which himſelf had dedicated, into the houſe of the LORD, ſilver and gold, and veſſels. 16. ¶ And there was war between Aſa and Baaſha king of Iſrael all their days. 17. And Baaſha king of Iſrael went up againſt Judah, and built Ramah, that he might not ſuffer any to go out or come in to Aſa king of Judah. 18. Then Aſa took all the ſilver and the gold *that were* left in the treaſures of the houſe of the LORD, and the treaſures of the kings houſe, and delivered them into the hand of his ſervants: and king Aſa ſent them to Ben-hadad the ſon of Tabrimon, the ſon of Hezion king of Syria, that dwelt at Damafcus, ſaying, 19. *There is* a league between me and thee, and between my father and thy father: behold I have ſent unto thee a preſent of ſilver and gold; come and break thy league with Baaſha king of Iſrael, that he may depart from me. 20. So Ben-hadad hearkned unto king Aſa, and ſent the captains of the hoſts, which he had, againſt the cities of Iſrael, and ſmote Ijon, and Dan, and Abel-beth-maachah, and all Cinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali. 21. And it came to paſs, when Baaſha heard *thereof*, that he left off building of Ramah, and dwelt in Tirzah. 22. Then king Aſa made a proclamation throughout all Judah (none was exempted) and they took away the ſtones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baaſha had builded, and king Aſa built with them Geba of Benjamin, and Mizpah. 23. The reſt of all the acts of Aſa, and all his might, and all that he did, and the cities which he built, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? Nevertheleſs, in the time of his old age he was diſeaſed in his feet. 24. And Aſa ſlept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Jehoſhaphat his ſon reigned in his ſtead.

We have here a ſhort account of the reign of Aſa; we ſhall find a more copious hiſtory of it, 2 Chron. xiv. xv. and xvi.

Here is, 1. The length of it: *He reigned forty one years in Jeruſalem*, ver. 10. In the account we have of the kings of Judah, we find the number of the good kings and the bad ones pretty near equal, but then we may obſerve to our comfort, that the reign of the good kings was generally long, but that of the bad kings ſhort; the conſideration of which will make the ſtate of God's church not altogether ſo bad within that period as at firſt ſeems: length of days is within wiſdom's right-hand. *Honour thy father*, much more thy heavenly Father, *that thy days may be long*.

2. The general good character of it, ver. 11. *Aſa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord*. And that is right indeed which is ſo in God's eyes. Thoſe are approved whom he commendeth. He did *as did David his father*, kept cloſe to God, and to his inſtituted worſhip, was hearty and zealous for that, which gave him this honourable character, that he was like David, though he was not a prophet, nor a pſalmiſt, as David was. If we come up to the graces of thoſe that are gone before us, it will be our praiſe with God, though we come ſhort of their gifts. Aſa was like David, though he was neither ſuch a conqueror, nor ſuch an author, for *his heart was perfect with the Lord all his days*, ver. 14. *i. e.* He was both cordial and conſtant in his religion. What he did for God, he was ſincere in, ſteady and uniform, and did it from a good principle, with a ſingle eye to the glory of God.

3. The particular inſtances of Aſa's piety. His times were times of reformation: For, (1.) He removed that which was evil. There reformation begins; and a great deal of work of that kind his hand found to do: For though it was but twenty years after the death of Solomon that he began to reign, yet very groſs corruptions had ſpread far, and taken deep root. Immorality he firſt ſtruck at; *he took away the ſodomites out of the land*, ſuppreſſed the bawdy-houſes; for, how can either prince or people proſper while thoſe cages of unclean and filthy birds, more dangerous than peſt-houſes, are ſuffered to remain? Then he proceeded againſt ido-

latry; *he removed all the idols*, even thoſe that his father had made, ver. 12. and if his father made them, he was the more concerned to remove them, that he might cut off the entail of the curſe, and prevent the viſiting of that iniquity upon him and his. Nay, which redounds much to his honour, and ſhews his heart was perfect with God, when he found idolatry in the court, he rooted it out thence, ver. 13. when it appears that Maachah his mother, or rather his grandmother, (but called his mother, becauſe ſhe had the education of him in his childhood) had an idol in a grove, though ſhe was his mother, his grandmother, though, it is likely, ſhe had a particular fondneſs for it, though being old ſhe could not live long to patronize it, though ſhe kept it for her own uſe only, yet he would by no means connive at it. Reformation muſt begin at home: Ill practices will never be ſuppreſſed in the country, while they are ſupported in the court. Aſa in every thing elſe will honour and reſpect his mother, he loves her well, but he loves his God better, and, like the Levites, Deut. xxxiii. 9. bravely forgets the relation when it comes in competition with his duty; and, if ſhe be an idolater, (1.) Her idol ſhall be deſtroyed, publickly expoſed to contempt, defaced, and burnt to aſhes *by the brook Kidron*, on which it is probable he ſtrewed the aſhes, in imitation of Moſes, Exod. xxxii. 20. and in token of his deteſtation of idolatry, and his indignation at it, wherever he found it. Let no remains of a court-idol appear. (2.) She ſhall be depoſed: He removed her from being queen, or from the queen, *i. e.* from converſing with his wife; he baniſhed her the court, and confined her to an obſcure and private life. They that have power, are happy when thus they have hearts to uſe it well.—(3.) He re-eſta bliſhed that which was good, ver. 15. *He brought into the houſe of God the dedicated things*, which he himſelf had vowed out of the ſpoils of the Ethiopians he had conquered, and which his father had vowed, but lived not to bring in purſuant to his vow. We muſt not only ceaſe to do evil, but learn to do well; not only caſt away the idols of our iniquity, but dedicate our ſelves and our all to God's honour and glory. When thoſe that in their infancy were by baptiſm devoted to God, make it their own act and deed to join themſelves to him, and vigorously employ themſelves in his ſervice, that is bringing in the dedicated things which they and their fathers have dedicated; it is neceſſary juſtice, rendring to God the things that are his.

4. The policies of his reign. He built cities himſelf to encourage the increaſe of his people, (ver. 23.) and to invite others to him by the conveniences of habitation: And he was very zealous to hinder Baaſha from building Ramah, becauſe he deſigned it for the cutting off of communication between his people and Jeruſalem, and to hinder thoſe who in obedience to God would come to worſhip there. An enemy muſt by no means be ſuffered to fortify a frontier town.

5. The faults of his reign. In both the things for which he was praiſed, he is found defective; the faireſt characters are not without ſome *but* or other in them. (1.) Did he take away the idols? That was well; *but the high places were not removed*, ver. 14. therein his reformation fell ſhort. He removed all images which were rivals with the true God, or falſe representations of him, but the altars which were ſet up in high places, and to which thoſe ſacrifices were brought which ſhould have been offered on the altar in the temple, thoſe he ſuffered to ſtand, thinking there was no great harm in them, they having been uſed by good men before the temple was built, and being loth to diſoblige the people who had a kindneſs for them, and were wedded to them both by cuſtom and convenience; whereas in Judah and Benjamin, the only tribes under Aſa's government, which lay ſo near Jeruſalem and the altars there, there was leſs pretence for them than in thoſe tribes that lay more remote. They were againſt the law, which obliged them to worſhip *at one place*, Deut. xii. 11. leſſened mens eſteem of the temple and the altars there, and were an open gap for idolatry to enter in at, while the people were ſo much addicted to it. It was not well that Aſa, when his hand was in, did not remove theſe; *nevertheleſs his heart was perfect with the Lord*. This affords us a comfortable note, that thoſe may be found honeſt and upright with God, and be accepted of him, who yet in ſome inſtances come ſhort of doing the good they might and ſhould do. The perfection which is made the indiſpenſable condition of the new covenant, is not to be underſtood of ſinleſſneſs, (then we were all undone) but ſincerity. (2.) Did he bring in the dedicated things? That was well: But he afterwards alienated the dedicated things, when he took the gold and ſilver out of the houſe of God, and ſent it as a bribe to Ben-hadad; to hire him to break his league with Baaſha, and, by making an inroad upon his country, to give him a diverſion from the building of Ramah, ver. 18, 19. Here he ſinned, (1.) In tempting Ben-hadad to break his league, and ſo to violate the publick faith. If he did ill to do it, as certainly he did, Aſa did ill to perſwade him to do it. (2.) In that he could not truſt God, who had done ſo much for him, to free him out of this ſtrait, without his uſing ſuch indirect means to help himſelf. (3.) In taking the gold out of the treasury of the temple, which was not to be made uſe of, but on extraordinary occaſions. The project ſucceeded, Ben-hadad made a deſcent upon the land of Iſrael, which obliged Baaſha to retire with his whole force from Ramah, ver. 20, 21.

which gave Aſa a fair opportunity to demolish his work there, and the timber and ſtones ſerved him for the building of ſome cities of his own, *ver.* 22. But though the deſign proſpered, we find it was diſpleaſing to God; and though Aſa valued himſelf upon the policy of it, and promiſed himſelf that it would effectually ſecure his peace, he is told by a prophet, that he had done fooliſhly, and that *from thenceforth he ſhould have wars*, ſee *2 Chron.* xvi. 7—9.

6. The troubles of his reign. For the moſt part he proſpered: But, 1. Baaſha king of Iſrael was a very troubleſome neighbour to him. He reigned twenty four years, and all his days had war, more or leſs, with Aſa, *ver.* 16. This was the effect of the diviſion of the kingdoms, that they were continually vexing one another, and ſo weakning one another, which made them both an eaſier prey to the common enemy. 2. In his old age, he was himſelf afflicted with the gout; he was diſeaſed in his feet, which made him leſs fit for buſineſs, and peeviſh towards thoſe about him.

7. The concluſion of his reign. The acts of it were more largely recorded in the common hiſtory (to which reference is here had, *ver.* 23.) than in this ſacred one. He reigned long, but finiſhed at laſt with honour, and left his throne to a ſucceſſor no way inferior to him.

25. ¶ And Nadab the ſon of Jeroboam began to reign over Iſrael, in the ſecond year of Aſa king of Judah, and reigned over Iſrael two years. 26. And he did evil in the ſight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in his ſin wherewith he made Iſrael to ſin. 27. ¶ And Baaſha the ſon of Ahijah, of the houſe of Iſſachar, conſpired againſt him; and Baaſha ſmote him at Gibbethon, which *belongeth* to the Philiftines (for Nadab and all Iſrael laid ſiege to Gibbethon) 28. Even in the third year of Aſa king of Judah, did Baaſha ſlay him, and reigned in his ſtead. 29. And it came to paſs when he reigned, *that* he ſmote all the houſe of Jeroboam, he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had deſtroyed him, according unto the ſaying of the LORD, which he ſpake by his ſervant Ahijah the Shilonite: 30. Becauſe of the ſins of Jeroboam which he ſinned, and which he made Iſrael ſin, by his provocation wherewith he provoked the LORD God of Iſrael to anger. 31. ¶ Now the reſt of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Iſrael? 32. And there was war between Aſa and Baaſha king of Iſrael all their days. 33. In the third year of Aſa king of Judah began Baaſha the ſon of Ahijah to reign over all Iſrael in Tirzah, twenty and four years. 34. And he did evil in the ſight of the LORD, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his ſin wherewith he made Iſrael to ſin.

We are now to take a view of the miſerable ſtate of Iſrael, while the kingdom of Judah was happy under Aſa's good government. It was threatned, that they ſhould be as *a reed ſhaken in the water*, chap. xiv. 15. and ſo they were, when during the ſingle reign of Aſa, the government of their kingdom was in ſix or ſeven different hands, as we find in this and the following chapter. Jeroboam was upon the throne in the beginning of his reign, and Ahab at the end of it; between whom were Nadab, Baaſha, Elah, Zimri, Tibni, and Omri, undermining and deſtroying one another. This they got by deſerting the houſe both of God and of David.

Here is, 1. The ruin and extirpation of the family of Jeroboam, according to the word of the Lord by Ahijah. His ſon Nadab ſucceeded him. If the death of his brother Abijah had had a due influence upon him, to make him religious, and the honour done him at his death, had engaged him to follow his good example, his reign might have been long and glorious; but he *walked in the way of his father*, *ver.* 26. kept up the worſhip of the calves, and forbade his ſubjects to go up to Jeruſalem to worſhip, *ſinned, and made Iſrael to ſin*, and therefore God brought ruin upon him quickly, in the ſecond year of his reign. He was beſieging Gibbethon, a city which the Philiftines had taken from the Danites, and was endeavouring to retake it; and there in the miſt of his army did Baaſha, with others, conſpire againſt him, and kill him, *ver.* 27. and ſo little intereſt had he in the affections of his people, that his army did not only not avenge his death, but choſe his murderſer his ſucceſſor. Whether Baaſha did it upon a perſonal pique againſt Nadab, or to be revenged on the houſe of Jeroboam, for ſome affront received from them; or whether under pretence of freeing his country from the tyranny of an ill prince; or whether purely from a principle of ambition, to make way for himſelf to the throne, doth not appear: but he *ſlew him, and reigned in his ſtead*, *ver.* 28. And the firſt thing he did when he came to the crown, was to *cut off*

all the houſe of Jeroboam, that he might the better ſecure himſelf, and his own uſurped government: He thought it not enough to impriſon or baniſh them, but he deſtroyed them, left not only none that piſſed againſt the wall, *i. e.* no males, as was foretold, chap. xiv. 10. but none that breathed. Herein he was barbarous, but God was righteous. Jeroboam's ſin was puniſhed, *ver.* 30. for they that provoke God, do it *to their own conſuſion*, ſee Jer. vii. 19. Ahijah's prophecy was accompliſhed, *ver.* 29. for no word of God ſhall fall to the ground. Divine threatnings are not bugbears.

2. The elevation of Baaſha. He ſhall be tried a while, as Jeroboam was; twenty four years he reigned, *ver.* 33. but ſhewed, it was not from any diſlike of Jeroboam's ſin that he deſtroyed his family, but from malice and ambition; for when he had rooted out the ſinner, he himſelf clave to the ſin, and *walked in the way of Jeroboam*, *ver.* 34. though he had ſeen the end of that way; ſo ſtrangely was his heart hardned with the deceitfulneſs of ſin.

C H A P. XVI.

This chapter is wholly concerning the kingdom of Iſrael, and the revolutions of that kingdom, many in a little time. The utter ruin of Jeroboam's family, after it had been twenty four years a royal family, we read of in the chapter before. In this chapter we have, 1. The ruin of Baaſha's family, after it had been but twenty ſix years a royal family, foretold by a prophet, ver. 1—7. and executed by Zimri, one of his captains, ver. 8—14. 2. The ſeven days reign of Zimri, and his ſudden fall, ver. 15—20. 3. The ſtruggle between Omri and Tibni, and Omri's prevalency, and his reign, ver. 21—28. 4. The beginning of the reign of Ahab, whom we ſhall afterwards read much of, ver. 29—33. 5. The rebuilding of Jericho, ver. 34. All this while in Judah, things went well.

1. **T**HEN the word of the LORD came to Jehu the ſon of Hanani againſt Baaſha, ſaying, 2. Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the duſt, and made thee prince over my people Iſrael, and thou haſt walked in the way of Jeroboam, and haſt made my people Iſrael to ſin, to provoke me to anger with their ſins: 3. Behold, I will take away the poſterity of Baaſha, and the poſterity of his houſe: and will make thy houſe like the houſe of Jeroboam the ſon of Nebat. 4. Him that dieth of Baaſha in the city, ſhall the dogs eat: and him that dieth of his in the fields, ſhall the fowls of the air eat. 5. Now the reſt of the acts of Baaſha, and what he did, and his might, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Iſrael? 6. So Baaſha ſlept with his fathers, and was buried in Tirzah, and Elah his ſon reigned in his ſtead. 7. And alſo by the hand of the prophet Jehu the ſon of Hanani, came the word of the LORD againſt Baaſha, and againſt his houſe, even for all the evil that he did in the ſight of the LORD, in provoking him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the houſe of Jeroboam, and becauſe he killed him. 8. ¶ In the twenty and ſixth year of Aſa king of Judah, began Elah the ſon of Baaſha to reign over Iſrael in Tirzah, two years. 9. And his ſervant Zimri (captain of half *his* chariots) conſpired againſt him, as he was in Tirzah, drinking himſelf drunk in the houſe of Arza, ſteward of *his* houſe in Tirzah. 10. And Zimri went in and ſmote him, and killed him, in the twenty and ſeventh year of Aſa king of Judah, and reigned in his ſtead. 11. ¶ And it came to paſs when he began to reign, as ſoon as he ſat on his throne, *that* he ſlew all the houſe of Baaſha: he left him not one that piſſeth againſt a wall, neither of his kinsfolks, nor of his friends. 12. Thus did Zimri deſtroy all the houſe of Baaſha, according to the word of the LORD, which he ſpake againſt Baaſha by Jehu the prophet. 13. For all the ſins of Baaſha, and the ſins of Elah his ſon, by which they ſinned, and by which they made Iſrael to ſin, in provoking the LORD God of Iſrael to anger with their vanities. 14. Now the reſt of the acts of Elah, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Iſrael?

Here is, 1. The ruin of the family of Baaſha foretold: He was a man likely enough to have raiſed and eſtabliſhed his family, active, politick, and daring; but he was an idolater, and that brought deſtruction upon his family. God ſent him warning of it before, 1. That if he were thereby wrought upon to repent and reform, the ruin might be prevented, for God threatens, that he may not ſtrike, as one that deſires not the death of ſinners. 2. That

2. That if not, it might appear, that the destruction, when it did come, whoever might be instruments of it, was the act of God's justice, and the punishment of sin. The warning was sent by *Jehu the son of Hanani*. The father was a seer or prophet at the same time, *2 Chron. xvi. 7*. He was there sent to Aza king of Judah, but the son, who was young, and more active, was sent on this longer and more dangerous expedition to Baasha king of Israel. *Juniores ad labores*. This Jehu was a prophet, and the son of a prophet. Prophecy, thus happily entailed, was worthy of so much the more honour. This Jehu continued long in this usefulness, for we find him reproving Jehoshaphat, *2 Chron. xix. 2*. above forty years after, and writing the annals of that prince, *2 Chron. xx. 24*. The message which this prophet brought to Baasha, is much the same with that which Ahijah sent to Jeroboam by his wife. (1.) He minds him of the great things God had done for him, *ver. 2*. *I exalted thee out of the dust*, to the *throne of glory*, a great instance of the divine sovereignty and power, *1 Sam. ii. 8*. Baasha seemed to have raised himself by his own treachery and cruelty, yet there was a hand of providence in it, to bring about God's counsels concerning Jeroboam's house; and God's owning his advancement as his act and deed, doth by no means amount to the patronizing of his ambition and treason. It is God that puts power into bad mens hands, which he makes to serve his good purposes, notwithstanding the ill use they make of it. *I made thee prince over my people*. God calls Israel his people still, though wretchedly corrupted, because they retained the covenant of circumcision, and there were many good people among them; it was not till long after, that they were called *Loammi*, not a people, *Hos. i. 9*. (2.) He charges him with high crimes and misdemeanors. 1. That he had *made Israel to sin*, had seduced God's subjects from their allegiance, and had brought them to pay the homage due to him only to dung-hill deities, and herein he had *walked in the way of Jeroboam*, *ver. 2*. and been *like his house*, *ver. 7*. (2.) That he had himself *provoked God to anger with the work of his hands*, i.e. by worshipping images, the *work of mens hands*; though others made them perhaps, he served them, and thereby avowed the making of them, and they are therefore called the *work of his hands*. (3.) That he had *destroyed the house of Jeroboam*, *ver. 7*. *because he killed him*, viz. Jeroboam's son, and all his; if he had done that with an eye to God, and to his will and glory, and from a holy indignation against the sins of Jeroboam and his house, he had been accepted and applauded as a minister of God's justice; but as he did it, he was only the tool of God's justice, but a servant to his own lusts, and is justly punished for the malice and ambition, which acted and governed him in all he did. — They that are any way employed in denouncing or executing the justice of God, (magistrates or ministers) are concerned to do it from a good principle, and in a holy manner, lest it turn into sin to them, and they make themselves obnoxious by it. — 3. He foretels the same destruction to come upon his family, which he himself had been employed to bring upon the family of Jeroboam, *ver. 3, 4*. They that resemble others in their sins, may expect to resemble them in their plagues, especially those who seem zealous against those sins in others, which they allow themselves in; the house of Jehu was reckoned with, for the blood of the house of Ahab, *Hos. i. 4*.

2. A reprieve granted for some time, so long, that Baasha himself dies in peace, and is buried with honour in his own royal city, *ver. 6*. so far is he from being a prey either to the dogs, or to the fowls, which yet was threatened to his house, *ver. 4*. he lives not either to see or feel the punishment threatened, yet he was himself the greatest delinquent; certainly, there must be a future state, in which impenitent sinners will suffer in their own persons, and not escape, as oft they do in this world; Baasha died under no visible stroke of divine vengeance for ought appears, but *God laid up his iniquity for his children*, as Job speaks, *chap. xxi. 19*. thus he often visits sin. — Observe, That Baasha is punished by the destruction of his children after his death, and his children are punished by the abuse of their bodies after their death, that is the only thing which the threatening instanteth in, *ver. 4*. that the dogs, and the fowls of the air, should eat them, as if herein were designed a tacit intimation, That there are punishments after death, when death has done its worst, which will be the worst punishments, and are most to be dreaded; these judgments on the body and posterity, signified judgments on the soul when separated from the body, by him, who *after he has killed, has power to cast into hell*.

3. Execution done at last. Baasha's son Elah, like Jeroboam's son Nadab, reigned two years, and then was slain by Zimri, one of his own soldiers, as he was by Baasha; so like was his house made to that of Jeroboam, as was threatened, *ver. 3*. because his idolatry was like his, and one of the sins for which God contended with him, being the destruction of Jeroboam's family, the more like the destruction of his own was to that, the nearer did the punishment resemble the sin, as face answers to face in a glass.

(1.) As then, so now, the king himself was first slain, but Elah fell more ingloriously than Nadab; Nadab was slain in the field of action and honour, he and his army then besieging

Gibbethon, *chap. xv. 27*. the siege being then raised upon the disaster, the city remaining still in the Philistines hands, but the army of Israel was now renewing the attempt, *ver. 15*. an Elah should have been with them to command in chief, but he loved his own ease and safety better than his honour or duty or the publick good, and therefore stayed behind to take his pleasure; and when he was *drinking himself drunk in his servant's house*, Zimri killed him, *ver. 9, 10*. Let it be a warning to drunkards, especially to those that designedly drink themselves drunk, that they know not but death may surprize them in that condition. 1. Death comes easily upon men when they are drunk; besides the chronical diseases which men frequently bring themselves into by hard drinking, and which cut them off in the midst of their days, men in that condition are easier overcome by an enemy, as Amnon by Absalom, and are liable to more ill accidents, being unable to help themselves. 2. Death comes terribly upon men in that condition, finding them in the act of sin, and incapacitated for any act of devotion; that day comes upon them at unawares, *Luke xxi. 34*. like a thief.

(2.) As then, so now, the whole family was cut off, and rooted out; the traitor was the successor, to whom the unthinking people tamely submitted, as if it were all one to them what king they had, so they had one; the first thing Zimri did, was to *slay all the house of Baasha*, thus he held by cruelty what he got by treason; his cruelty seems to have extended further than Baasha's did against the house of Jeroboam, for he left to Elah none of his kinsfolk or friends, *ver. 11*. none of his avengers, so the word is, none that were likely to avenge his death, yet divine justice soon avenged it so remarkably, that it was used as a proverb long after, *Had Zimri peace that slew his master?* *2 Kings ix. 31*. In this, 1. The word of God was fulfilled, *ver. 12*. 2. The sins of Baasha and Elah were reckoned for, with which they provoked God by their vanities, *ver. 13*. their idols are called their vanities, for they cannot profit nor help; miserable are those whose deities are vanities.

15. ¶ In the twenty and seventh year of Aza king of Judah, did Zimri reign seven days in Tirzah: and the people were encamped against Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines. 16. And the people that were encamped heard say, Zimri hath conspired, and hath also slain the king: wherefore all Israel made Omri the captain of the host, king over Israel that day in the camp. 17. And Omri went up from Gibbethon, and all Israel with him, and they besieged Tirzah. 18. And it came to pass when Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went into the palace of the king's house, and burnt the king's house over him with fire, and died; 19. For his sins which he sinned in doing evil in the sight of the LORD, in walking in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin which he did, to make Israel sin. 20. Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and his treason that he wrought, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 21. ¶ Then were the people of Israel divided into two parts: half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king; and half followed Omri. 22. But the people that followed Omri, prevailed against the people that followed Tibni the son of Ginath: so Tibni died, and Omri reigned. 23. ¶ In the thirty and one year of Aza king of Judah, began Omri to reign over Israel twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah. 24. And he bought the hill Samaria of Shemer, for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria. 25. ¶ But Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that were before him. 26. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities. 27. Now the rest of the acts of Omri, which he did, and his might that he shewed, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 28. So Omri slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria, and Ahab his son reigned in his stead.

Solomon observes, *Prov. xxviii. 2*. that *for a transgression of a land, many are the princes thereof*, (so it was here in Israel) *but by a man of understanding, the state thereof shall be prolonged*, so it was with Judah at the same time under Aza; when men forsake God, they are out of the way of rest and establishment; Zimri, and Tibni, and Omri, are here striving for the crown; proud aspiring men ruin one another, and involve others in the ruin; these confusions end in the settlement of Omri, we must therefore take him along with us, through this part of the story.

1. How he was chosen, as the Roman emperors often were, by the army in the field, now encamped before Gibbethon; notice was soon brought thither that Zimri had slain their king, *ver. 16.* and set up himself in Tirzah, the royal city, whereupon they chose Omri king in the camp, that they might without delay, avenge the death of Elah upon Zimri; though he was but an idle drunken sot, yet he was their king, and they would not tamely submit to his murderer, nor let the treason go unpunished; they did not attempt to avenge the death of Nadab upon Baasha, perhaps, because the house of Baasha had ruled with more gentleness than the house of Jeroboam; but Zimri shall feel the resentments of the provoked army; the siege of Gibbethon is quitted; (Philistines are sure to gain when Israelites quarrel) and Zimri is prosecuted.

2. How he conquered Zimri; he is said to have reigned seven days, *ver. 15.* so long before Omri was proclaimed king, and himself proclaimed traitor, but we may suppose it a longer time before he died, for he continued long enough to shew his inclination to the way of Jeroboam, and to make himself obnoxious to the justice of God, by supporting his idolatry *ver. 19.*—Tirzah was a beautiful city, but not fortified, so that Omri soon made himself master of it, *ver. 17.* forced Zimri into the palace, which, being unable to defend, and yet unwilling to surrender, he burnt, and himself in it, *ver. 18.* grudging that his rival should ever enjoy the sumptuous palace, he burnt it, and fearing that if he fell into the hands of the army, either alive or dead, he should be ignominiously treated, he burnt himself in it; see what desperate practices mens wickedness sometimes brings them to, and how it hurries them into their own ruin; see the genius of incendiaries, who set palaces and kingdoms on fire, though they are themselves in danger of perishing in the flame.

3. How he struggled with Tibni, and at length got clear of him; *half of the people followed this Tibni,* *ver. 21.* probably, those that were in Zimri's interest, with whom others joined, who would not have a king chosen in the camp, lest he should rule by the sword, and a standing army, but in a convention of the states; the contest between these two lasted some years, and, it is likely, cost a great deal of blood on both sides, for it was in the twenty seventh year of of Afa that Omri was first elected, *ver. 15.* and from thence the twelve years of his reign are to be dated, but it was not till the thirty first year of Afa that he began to reign without a rival, then Tibni died, it is likely, in battle, *and Omri reigned,* *ver. 22.* Sir Walter Raleigh in his History of the world, l. 2. c. 19. §. 6. enquires here, why it was, that in all these confusions and revolutions of the kingdom of Israel, they never thought of returning to the house of David, and uniting themselves again to Judah, *for then was it better with them than now,* and he thinks the reason was, because the kings of Judah assumed a more resolute, arbitrary, and despotick power than the kings of Israel; it was the heaviness of the yoke that they complained of, when they first revolted from the house of David, and the dread of that made them averse to it ever after, and adhere to kings of their own, who ruled more by law, and the rules of a limited monarchy.

4. How he reigned, when he was at length settled on the throne. 1. He made himself famous by building Samaria, which ever after was the royal city of the kings of Israel, the palace at Tirzah being burnt, and in process of time grew so considerable, that it gave name to the middle part of Canaan, which lay between Galilee on the north, and Judea on the south, and to the inhabitants of that country, who were called Samaritans.—He bought the ground for *two talents of silver,* somewhat more than seven hundred pounds of our money, (for a talent was three hundred fifty three pounds eleven shillings and ten pence, *eb.*)—Perhaps, Shemer that sold him the ground, let him have it considerably the cheaper, upon condition, the the city should be called after his name, which otherwise would have born the name of the purchaser; it was called Samaria, or Shemerem, as it is in the Hebrew, from Shemer, the *quondam* owner, *ver. 24.* The kings of Israel changed their royal seats, Shechem first, then Tirzah, now Samaria, but the kings of Judah were constant to Jerusalem, the city of God; they that cleave to the Lord, fix, they that leave him, ever wander.—2. He made himself infamous by his wickedness, *for he did worse than all that were before him,* *ver. 25.* Though he was brought to the throne with much difficulty, and providence had remarkably favoured him in his advancement, yet he was more profane, or more superstitious, and a greater persecutor, than either of the houses of Jeroboam or Baasha; he went further than they had done, in *establishing iniquity by a law,* and forcing his subjects to comply with him in it; for we read of the statutes of Omri, the keeping of which made *Israel a filthy sin,* Micah vi. 16. Jeroboam made Israel to sin by temptation, example and allurements, but Omri did it by compulsion.

5. How he ended his reign, *ver. 27, 28.* He was in some repute for the might which he shewed; many an ill man has been a stout man.—He died in his bed, as Jeroboam and Baasha did themselves, but, like them, left it to his posterity to fill up the measure, and then pay off the scores of his iniquity.

29. ¶ And in the thirty and eighth year of Afa king of Judah, began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel; and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria, twenty and two years. 30. And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, above all that were before him. 32. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat; that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. 32. And he reared up an altar for Baal, in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. 33. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger, than all the kings of Israel that were before him. 34. ¶ In his days did Hiel the Beth-elite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun.

We have here the beginning of the reign of Ahab, of whom we have more particulars recorded, than of any of the kings of Israel; we have here only a general idea given us of him, as the worst of all the kings, that we may expect what the particulars will be; he reigned twenty two years, long enough to do a deal of mischief.

1. He exceeded all his predecessors in wickedness, *did evil above all that were before him,* *ver. 30.* and as if it were done with a particular enmity both to God and Israel, to affront him, and ruin them; it is said, *he did more purposely to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger,* and consequently to send judgments on his land, *than all the kings of Israel that went before him,* *ver. 33.* It was bad with the people, when their kings were each worse than other, what would they come to at last? He had seen the ruin of other wicked kings and their families, yet instead of taking warning, his heart was hardened and enraged against God by it.—He thought it *a light thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam,* *ver. 31.* it was nothing to break the second commandment by image worship, he would set aside the first two by introducing other gods; his little finger should fall heavier upon God's ordinances than Jeroboam's loins; making light of lesser sins makes way for greater, and they that extenuate other peoples sins will aggravate their own.

2. He married an ill woman, who he knew would bring in the worship of Baal, and seemed to marry her with that design.—*As if it had been a light thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam,* *he took to wife Jezebel,* *ver. 31.* a zealous idolater, extremely imperious and malicious in her natural temper, addicted to witchcrafts and whoredoms, *2 Kings ix. 20.* and every way vicious; that false prophets spoken of *Rev. ii. 22.* is there called Jezebel, for an ill woman could not be called by a worse name than hers; what mischiefs she did, and what mischief at last befel her, *2 Kings ix. 33.* we shall find in the following story; this one strange wife debauched Israel more than all Solomon's.

3. He set up the worship of Baal, forsook the God of Israel, and served the god of the Sidonians, Jupiter instead of Jehovah; the sun, so some think; a deified hero of the Phenicians, so others; he was weary of the golden calves, and thought they had worshipped them long enough; such vanities were they, that those who had been fond of them, at length grew sick of them, and, like adulterers, must have variety. In honour of this mock deity, whom they called Baal, lord, and for the convenience of his worship, 1. Ahab built a temple in Samaria, the royal city, because the temple of God was in Jerusalem, the royal city of the other kingdom; he would have Baal's temple near him, that he might the better frequent it, protect it, and put honour upon it. 2. He reared an altar in that temple, on which to offer sacrifice to Baal, by which they acknowledged their dependence upon him, and sought his favour. O the stupidity of idolaters, who are at a great expence to make one their friend, whom they might have chosen whether they would have made a god of or no! 3. He made a grove about his temple, either a natural one, by planting shady trees there, or, if those would be too long in growing, an artificial one in imitation of it, for it is not said he planted, but he made a grove, something that answered the intention, which was to conceal, and so countenance the abominable impurities that were committed in the filthy worship of Baal. *Lucus à lucendo, quia non lucet.* He that doth evil hates the light.

4. One of his subjects, in imitation of his presumption, ventured to build Jericho, in defiance of the curse Joshua had long since pronounced on him that should attempt it, *ver. 34.* It comes in as an instance of the height of impiety men were then arrived to, especially at Bethel, where one of the calves was, for of that city this daring sinner was. Observe, (1.) How ill he did, like Achan, he meddled with the accursed thing, turned that

that to his own use which was devoted to God's honour; he began to build in defiance of the curse well known in Israel, jesting with it perhaps as a bugbear, or fancying its force worn out by length of time, for it was above five hundred years since it was pronounced, *Josh. vi. 26*. He went on to build in defiance of the execution of the curse in part, for though his eldest son died when he began, yet he would proceed in contempt of God, and his wrath revealed from heaven against his ungodliness. (2.) How ill he sped, he built for his children, but God wrote him childless; his eldest son died when he began, the youngest when he finished, and all the rest (it is supposed) between. Note, Those whom God curseth are cursed indeed, none ever hardened his heart against God and prospered. God keep us back from presumptuous sins, those great transgressions!

C H A P. XVII.

So sad was the character of both the princes and people of Israel in the foregoing chapter, that one would expect God should cast off a people that had so cast him off; but, as an evidence of the contrary, never was Israel so blessed with a good prophet as when it was so plagued with a bad king, never was king so bold to sin as Ahab, never was prophet so bold to reprove and threaten as Elijah, whose story begins in this chapter, and is full of wonders; scarce any part of the Old Testament history shines brighter than this of the spirit and power of Elias, he only of all the prophets had the honour of Enoch, the first prophet, to be translated that he should not see death, and the honour of Moses, the great prophet, to attend our Saviour in his transfiguration; other prophets prophesied and wrote, he prophesied and acted, but wrote nothing, and his actions cast more lustre on his name than their writings on theirs. In this chapter we have, (1.) His prediction of a famine in Israel through the want of rain, ver. 1. (2.) The provision God made for him in that famine, (1.) By the ravens at the brook Cherith, ver. 2—7. (2.) When that failed, by a widow at Zarephath, who received him in the name of a prophet, and had a prophet's reward, for (1.) He multiplied her meal and her oil, ver. 8—16. (2.) He raised her dead son to life, ver. 17—24. Thus his story begins with judgments and miracles, designed to awaken that stupid generation that had so deeply corrupted themselves.

1. **A**ND Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. 2. And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, 3. Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. 4. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. 5. So he went, and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. 6. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening: and he drank of the brook. 7. And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

The history of Elijah begins somewhat abruptly: usually, when a prophet enters, we have some account of his parentage, are told whose son he was, and of what tribe, but Elijah drops out of the clouds as it were, as if, like Melchisedeck, he were without father, without mother, and without descent, which made some of the Jews fancy he was an angel sent from heaven, but the apostle has assured us that *he was a man subject to like passions as we are*, (James v. 17.) which perhaps intimates not only that he was liable to the common infirmities of the human nature, but that by his natural temper he was a man of strong passions, more hot and eager than most other men, and therefore the more fit to deal with the daring sinners of the age he lived in: so wonderfully doth God suit men to the work he designs them for; rough spirits are called to rough services; the reformation needed such a man as Luther to break the ice.

Observe, (1.) His name, *Elijah, my God Jehovah is he*, so it signifies, is he that sends me, and will own me, and bear me out, is he to whom I would bring Israel back, and who alone can effect that great work. (2.) His country, he was of the inhabitants of Gilead, on the other side Jordan, either of the tribe of Gad, or that half of Manasseh, for Gilead was divided between them, but whether a native of either of those tribes is uncertain; the obscurity of his parentage was no prejudice to his eminency afterwards; we need not enquire whence men are, but what they are; if it be a good thing, no matter though it come out of Nazareth; Israel was sore wounded when God sent them this balm from Gilead, and this physician thence.—He is called a Tishbite from Tishbe, a town in that country.

Two things we have an account of here in the beginning of

his story. 1. How he foretold a famine, a long and grievous famine, with which Israel should be punished for their sins; the fruitful land, for want of rain, should be turned into barrenne for the iniquity of them that dwelt therein; he went and tol Ahab this, did not whisper it to the people to make them disaffected to the government, but proclaimed it to the king, in whose power it was to reform the land, and so to prevent the judgment it is probable, he reprov'd Ahab for his idolatry and other wickedness, and told him that unless he repented and reformed, this judgment would be brought upon his land; there should be *neither dew nor rain of some years*, none but *according to my word*, i. e. expect none till you hear from me again; the apostle teacheth us to understand this not only of the word of prophecy, but the word of prayer, which turned the key of the clouds, James v. 17, 18. he prayed earnestly in a holy indignation at Israel's apostasy, and a holy zeal for the glory of God, whose judgments were defied, *that it might not rain*, and according to his prayers the heavens became brass, till he *prayed again that it might rain*. In allusion to this story it is said of God's witnesses, *Rev. xi. 6*. these have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy.

Elijah lets Ahab know, (1.) That the Lord Jehovah is the God of Israel, whom he had forsaken. (2.) That he is a living God, and not like the gods he worshipped, which were dead dumb idols. (3.) That he was his servant in office, and a messenger sent from him, it is he before whom I stand, to minister to him, or whom I now represent, in whose stead I stand, and in whose name I speak, in defiance of the prophets of Baal and the groves. (4.) That notwithstanding the present peace and prosperity of their kingdom, God was displeased with them for their idolatry, and would chastise them for it by the want of rain, which when he withheld it was not in the power of the gods they served to bestow, for *are there any of the vanities of the heathen that can give rain?* Jer. xiv. 22. which would effectually prove their impotency, and the folly of those who left the living God to make their court to such as could do neither good nor evil; and this he confirms with a solemn oath, *As the Lord God of Israel liveth*, that Ahab might stand the more in awe of the threatening, the divine life being engaged for the accomplishment of it. (5.) He lets him know what interest he had in heaven, it shall be *according to my word*; how big doth he speak when he speaks in God's name, as one who well understood that commission of a prophet, Jer. i. 10. *I have set thee over the nations, and over the kingdoms*, the power of prayer, and the truth of God's word, for he performeth the counsel of his messengers.

2. How he was himself taken care of in that famine.

1. How he was hid.—God bid him *go and hide himself by the brook Cherith*, ver. 3. This was intended not so much for his preservation, for it doth not appear that Ahab immediately sought his life, but as a judgment to the people, to whom, if he had publicly appeared, he might have been a blessing, both by his instructions and his intercession, and so have shortened the days of their calamity, but God had determined it should last three years and a half, and therefore so long appointed Elijah to abscond, that he might not be solicited to revoke the sentence, the execution whereof he had said should be *according to his word*: When God speaks concerning a nation to pluck up and destroy, he finds some way or other to remove those that should stand in the gap, to turn away his wrath; it bodes ill to a people when good men and good ministers are ordered to hide themselves; when God intended to send rain upon earth, then he bid Elijah go *show himself to Ahab*, chap. xviii. 1. For the present, in obedience to the divine command, he went and dwelt all alone in some obscure unfrequented place, where he was not discovered, probably among the reeds of the brook; if providence calls us to solitude and retirement, it becomes us to acquiesce; when we cannot be useful we must be patient, and when we cannot work for God we must sit still quietly for him.

2. How he was fed, though he could not work there, having nothing to do but to meditate and pray, (which would help to prepare him for his usefulness afterwards) yet he shall eat, for he is in the way of his duty, and *verily he shall be fed, in the day of famine he shall be satisfied*; when the woman, the church, is driven into the wilderness, care is taken that she be fed and nourished there time, times, and half a time, i. e. Three years and a half, which was just the time of Elijah's concealment. See *Rev. xii. 6, 14*. Elijah must drink of the brook, and the ravens were appointed to bring him meat, ver. 4. and did so, ver. 6. Here, 1. The provision was plentiful and good, and constant, bread and flesh twice a day, daily bread, and food convenient; we may suppose he fared not so sumptuously as the prophet of the groves, that did eat at Jezebel's table, chap. xviii. 19. and yet better than the rest of the Lord's prophets whom Obadiah fed with bread and water, chap. xviii. 4. It ill becomes God's servants, especially his servants the prophets, to be nice and curious about their food, and to affect dainties and varieties; if nature be sustained, no matter though the palate be not pleased; instead of envying those who have daintier fare, we should think how many there are better than we who live comfortably upon coarser fare, and would be glad of our leavings; Elijah had but one meal brought him at a time, every morning and every evening, to teach him not to

take thought for the morrow; let those who have but from hand to mouth learn to live upon providence, and trust that for *the bread of the day in the day*, thank God for bread this day; and let to morrow bring with it.

2. The caterers were very unlikely; the ravens brought it him, there was Obadiah and others in Israel that had not bowed the knee to Baal, who would gladly have entertained Elijah, but he is a man by himself, and shall be fed in an extraordinary way; he was a figure of John the baptist, whose meat was locusts and wild honey; God could have sent angels to minister to him, as he did afterward, *chap. xix. 5.* and as he did to our Saviour, *Matt. iv. 11.* but he chose to send by winged messengers of another nature, to shew that when he pleaseth he can serve his own purposes by the meanest creatures as effectually as by the mightiest; if it be asked, whence the ravens had this provision, how and where it was cooked; and whether they came honestly by it, we must answer as Jacob did, *Gen. xxvii. 20.* *The Lord our God brought it to them*, whose the earth is; and the fulness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein. But why ravens? (1.) They are birds of prey, greedy devouring creatures, more likely to have taken his meat from him, or to have picked out his eyes, (*Prov. xxx. 17.*) but thus Samson's riddle is again unriddled, *out of the eater comes forth meat.* (2.) They are unclean creatures, *every raven after his kind* was by the law forbidden to be eaten, *Lev. xi. 16.* yet Elijah did not think the meat they brought ever the worse for that, but eat and gave thanks, asking no question for conscience sake.—Noah's dove was to him a more faithful messenger than his raven, yet here the ravens are faithful and constant to Elijah. (3.) Ravens feed on insects and carrion themselves, yet they brought the prophet man's meat, and wholesome food; it is pity those who bring the bread of life to others should themselves take up with *that which is not bread.* (4.) Ravens could bring but a little, and broken meat, yet Elijah was content with such things as he had, and thankful he was fed, though not feasted. (5.) Ravens neglect their own young ones, and do not feed them, yet when God pleaseth they shall feed his prophet; young lions and young ravens may lack and suffer hunger, but not they that fear the Lord, *Psal. xxxiv. 10.*—(6.) Ravens are themselves fed by special providence, *Job xxxviii. 41.* *Psal. cxlvii. 9.* and now they feed the prophet; have we experienced God's special goodness to us and ours, let us reckon our selves obliged thereby to be kind to those that are his for his sake.—Let us learn from hence, (1.) To acknowledge the sovereignty and power of God over all the creatures, he can make what use he pleaseth of them, either for judgment or mercy. (2.) To encourage our selves in God in the greatest straits, and never to distrust him; he that could furnish a table in the wilderness, and make ravens purveyors, cooks and servants to his prophet, is able to supply all our needs according to his riches in glory.

Thus doth Elijah for a great while *eat his morsels alone*, and his provision of water which he has in an ordinary way from the brook fails him before that which he had by miracle; the powers of nature are limited, but not the powers of the God of nature; Elijah's brook dried up, *ver. 7.* *because there was no rain*; if the heavens fail, earth fails of course; such are all our creature comforts, we lose them when we most need them, like the *brooks in summer*, *Job vi. 15.* But there is *a river which makes glad the city of God*, that never runs dry; *Psal. xlvii. 4.* *a well of water that springs up to eternal life*; Lord, give us that living water!

8. ¶ And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, 9. Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which *belongeth* to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. 10. So he arose, and went to Zarephath: and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman *was* there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. 11. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. 12. And she said, *As the LORD thy God liveth*, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and behold, I *am* gathering two sticks, that I may go in, and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. 13. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go *and* do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. 14. For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day *that* the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth. 15. And she went, and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house did eat *many* days. 16. *And* the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD which he spake by Elijah.

We have here an account of the further protection Elijah was taken under; and the further provision made for him in his retirement; *at destruction and famine he shall laugh* that has God for his friend, to guard and maintain him; the brook Cherith is dried up, but God's care of his people, and kindness to them, never slackens, never fails, but is still the same, is still *continued and drawn out to them that know him*, *Psal. xxxvi. 10.* When the brook was dried up, Jordan was not, why did not God send him thither? surely because he would shew that he has variety of ways to provide for his people, and is not tied to any one; God will now provide for him there, where he shall have some company and opportunity of usefulness, and not be as he had been buried alive. Observe,

(1.) The place he is sent to; to Zarephath, (or Sarepta) a city of Sidon, out of the borders of the land of Israel, *ver. 9.* Our Saviour takes notice of this as an early and ancient indication of the favour God designed for the poor Gentiles, in the fulness of time; *Luke iv. 25, 26.* *Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias*, and some, it is likely, that would have bid him welcome to their houses; yet he sent to honour and bless with his presence a city of Sidon, a Gentile city, and so becomes (saith Dr. Lightfoot) *the first prophet of the Gentiles.*—Israel had corrupted themselves with the idolatries of the nations, and were become worse than they, justly therefore is *the casting off of them the riches of the world.* Elijah was hated and driven out by his countrymen, therefore, *Lo, he turns to the Gentiles*, as the apostles were afterwards ordered to do, *Acts xviii. 6.*—But why to a city of Sidon? Perhaps, because the worship of Baal, which was now the crying sin of Israel, came lately from thence with Jezebel, who was a Sidonian, *chap. xvi. 31*: therefore thither he shall go, that thence may be fetched the destroyer of that idolatry, even *out of Sidon have I called my prophet, my reformer*; Jezebel was Elijah's greatest enemy, yet, to shew her the impotency of her malice, God will find a hiding place for him even in her country; Christ never went among the Gentiles, but once *into the coasts of Sidon*, *Matt. xv. 21.*

(2.) The person that is appointed to entertain him, not one of the rich merchants or great men of Sidon, not such a one as Obadiah, that was governor of Ahab's house, and fed the prophets, but a poor widow woman destitute and desolate is commanded, (*i. e.* is made both able and willing) to sustain him, it is God's way, and it is his glory, to make use of, and put honour upon the *weak and foolish things of the world.*—He is in a special manner the widows God, and feeds them, and therefore they must study what they shall render to him.

(3.) The provision made for him there; providence brought the widow women to meet him very opportunely at the gate of the city, *ver. 10.* and by what is here related of what past between Elijah and her we find,

1. Her case and character, and here it appears, (1.) That she was very poor and necessitous, she had nothing to live upon but a handful of meal and a little oil, needy at the best, and now by the general scarcity reduced to the last extremity, when she has eaten the little she has, for ought she yet sees, she must die for want, she and her son, *ver. 12.* she had no fuel but the sticks she gathered in the streets, and having no servant she must gather them herself, *ver. 10.* more likely to receive alms than give entertainment, to her Elijah is sent, that he might still live upon providence; as much as he did when the ravens fed him; it was in compassion to the low estate of his handmaiden that God sent the prophet to her, not to beg of her, but to board with her and he would pay well for his table.

(2.) That she was very humble and industrious, he found her gathering sticks, and preparing to bake her own bread, *ver. 10, 12.* her mind was brought to her condition, and she complains not of the hardship she was brought to, nor quarrels with the divine providence for withholding rain, but accommodates herself to it as well as she can; such as are of this temper in a day of trouble, are best prepared for honour and relief from God.

(3.) That she was very charitable and generous, when this stranger desired her to go fetch him some water to drink, she readily went at the first word, *ver. 10, 11.* she objected not the present scarcity of it, nor asked him what he would give her for a draught of water, for now it was worth money, nor that he was a stranger, an Israelite, with whom, perhaps, the Sidonians cared not for having any dealings, no more than the Samaritans, *John iv. 9.* She did not excuse herself with her weakness through famine, or the urgency of her own affairs, did not tell him she had something else to do than to go of his errands, but left her gathering of the sticks for herself to fetch water for him, which, perhaps, she did the more willingly, being moved with the gravity of his aspect; we should be ready to do any office of kindness even to strangers; if we have not wherewith to give to the distressed, we must be the more ready to work for them; a cup of cold water, though it cost us no more but the labour of fetching, it shall in no wise lose its reward.

(4.) That she had a great confidence in the word of God; it was a great trial of her faith and obedience, when she told the prophet how low her stock of meal and oil was, and that she had but just enough for herself and her son, and he bid her *make a cake*

cake for him, and make his first, and after prepare for herself and her son; if we consider, it will appear as great a trial as could be in so small a matter; let the children first be served, (might she have said) charity begins at home, she was not on the giving hand, had but a little, and when that was gone, knew not where to have more; a great deal more reason she had than Nabal to ask, Shall I take my meal and my oil, and give it to one that I know not whence he is? He did indeed make mention of the God of Israel, ver. 14. but what was that to a Sidonian? Or if she had a veneration for the name Jehovah, and valued the God of Israel as the true God, yet what assurance had she that this stranger was his prophet, or had any warrant to speak in his name? It was easy for a hungry vagrant to impose upon her with a sham, but she gets over all these objections, obeys the precept, in dependence upon the promise, she went and did according to the saying of Elijah, ver. 15. O woman, great was thy faith, one has not found the like, no not in Israel; all things considered, it exceeded that of the widow, that when she had but two mites cast them into the treasury, she took the prophet's word that she should not lose by it, but it should be repayed with interest; those that can venture upon the promise of God, will make no difficulty of exposing and emptying themselves in his service, and giving him his dues out of a little, and giving him his part first; they that deal with God, must deal upon trust; seek first his kingdom, and then other things shall be added; by the law the first-fruits were God's, the tithe was taken out first, and the heave-offering of their dough was first offered, Numb. xv, 20, 21.—But surely, the increase of this widow's faith to such a degree as to enable her thus to deny herself and to depend upon the divine promise, was as great a miracle in the kingdom of grace, as the increase of her oil was in the kingdom of providence; happy are they that can thus against hope believe, and obey in hope.

2. The care God took of her and her guest, the barrel of meal wasted not, nor did the cruse of oil fail, but still as they took from them, more was added to them by the divine power.—ver. 16. Never did corn or olive so increase in the growing (saith bishop Hall) as these did in the using; but the multiplying of the seed sown, 2 Cor. ix. 10. in the common course of providence, is an instance of the power and goodness of God, not to be overlooked because common; the meal and the oil multiplied, not in the hoarding, but in the spending, for there is that scattereth and yet increaseth; when God blesteth a little, it will go a great way, even beyond expectation, as on the contrary, though there be abundance, if he blow upon it, it comes to little, Hag. i. 9. ii. 16.

(1.) This was a maintenance for the prophet; still miracles shall be his daily bread; hitherto he was fed with bread and flesh, now with bread and oil, which they used as we do butter; Manna was both, for the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil, Numb. xi. 8. This Elijah was thankful for, though he had been used to flesh twice a day, and now had none at all; those that cannot live without flesh once a day at least, because they have been used to it, could not have boarded contentedly with Elijah, no not to live upon a miracle.

(2.) It was a maintenance for the poor widow and her son, and a recompence to her for entertaining the prophet; there is nothing lost by being kind to God's people and ministers, she that received a prophet, had a prophet's reward; she gave him house-room, and he repayed her with food for her household; Christ has promised to those who open their doors to him, that he will come in to them, and sup with them, and they with him, Rev. iii. 20. Like Elijah here, he brings to those who bid him welcome, not only his own entertainment, but theirs too.—See how the reward answered the service, she generously made one cake for the prophet, and was repayed with many for herself and her son; when Abraham offers his only son to God, he is told he shall be the father of multitudes; what is laid out in piety or charity, is set out to the best interest upon the best securities.—One poor meal's meat this poor widow gave the prophet, and in recompence of it, she and her son did eat many days, ver. 15. above two years, in a time of general scarcity; and to have their food from God's special favour, and to eat it in such good company as Elijah's, made it more than doubly sweet; it is promised to them that trust in God, that they shall not be ashamed in the evil time, but in the days of famine they shall be satisfied, Psal. xxxvii. 19.

17. ¶ And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick, and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him. 18. And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son? 19. And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed. 20. And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow, with whom I sojourn, by slaying her

son? 21. And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again. 22. And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. 23. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and deliver him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth. 24. ¶ And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth.

We have here a further recompence made to the widow for her kindness to the prophet; as if that were a small thing to be kept alive, her son when dead is restored to life, and so restored to her. Observe,

1. The sickness and death of the child, for ought appears, he was her only son, the comfort of her widowed estate.—He was fed miraculously, and yet that did not secure him from sickness and death; Your fathers did eat manna and are dead, but there is bread, of which a man may eat and not die, which was given for the life of the world, John vi. 49, 50. This affliction was to this widow, as a thorn in the flesh, lest she should be lifted up above measure with the favours that were done her, and the honours that were put upon her. (1.) She was nurse to a great prophet, was employed to sustain him, and had reason to think surely the Lord would do her good, yet now she loses her child. Note, We must not think it strange if we meet with very sharp afflictions, even then when we are in the way of duty, and of eminent service to God. (2.) She was herself nursed by miracle, and kept a good house, without charge or care, by a distinguishing blessing from heaven, and in the midst of all this satisfaction she is thus afflicted. Note, When we have the clearest manifestations of God's favour and good-will towards us, even then we must prepare for the rebukes of providence; our mountain never stands so strong but it may be moved, and therefore in this world we must always rejoice with trembling.

2. Her pathetic complaint to the prophet of this affliction; it should seem the child died suddenly, else she would have applied herself to Elijah while he was sick, for the cure of him, but being dead, dead in her bosom, she expostulates with the prophet upon it, rather to give vent to her sorrow, than in any hope of relief, ver. 18.

(1.) She expresseth herself passionately, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? How unconcernedly had she spoke of her own, and her child's death, when she expected to die for want, ver. 12. that we may eat it and die! yet now her child dies, and not so miserably as by famine, she is extremely disturbed at it; we may speak lightly of an affliction at a distance, but when it toucheth us we are troubled, Job iv. 5. Then she spoke deliberately, now in haste; the death of the child was now a surprize to her, and it is hard to keep our spirits composed, when troubles come upon us suddenly and unexpectedly, and in the midst of our peace and prosperity.—She calls him a man of God, and yet quarrels with him, as if he had occasioned the death of her child, and is ready to wish she had never seen him, forgetting past mercies and miracles; what have I done against thee? so some understand it; wherein have I offended thee, or been wanting in my duty? Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me?

(2.) Yet she expresseth herself penitently, art thou come to call my sin to thy remembrance, as the cause of the affliction, and so to call it to my remembrance, as the effect of the affliction? Perhaps she knew of Elijah's intercession against Israel, and being conscious to herself of sin, perhaps, her former worshipping of Baal, the god of the Sidonians, she apprehends he had made intercession against her. Note, 1. When God removes our comforts from us, he remembers our sins against us, perhaps the iniquities of our youth, though long since past, Job xiii. 26. Our sins are the death of our children. 2. When God thus remembers our sins against us, he designs thereby to make us remember them against our selves, and repent of them.

3. The prophet's address to God upon this occasion; he gave no answer to her expostulation, but brought it to God, and laid the case before him, not knowing what to say to it himself; he took the dead child from the mother's bosom to his own bed, ver. 19. Probably, he had taken a particular kindness to the child, and found the affliction his own more than sympathy; he retired to his chamber, and, 1. He humbly reasons with God concerning the death of the child, ver. 20. He sees death striking by commission from God, Thou hast brought this evil, for is there any evil of this kind in the city, in the family, and the Lord has not done it? He pleads the greatness of the affliction to the poor mother, it is evil upon the widow, thou art the widow's God, and dost not use to bring evil upon widows, it is affliction added to the afflicted; he pleads his own concern, it is the widow with whom I sojourn, wilt thou that art my God, bring evil upon one of the best of my benefactors? I shall be reflected upon, and others will be afraid of entertaining me, if I bring death

death into the houses where I come.—2. He earnestly begs of God to restore the child to life again, *ver. 21.* We do not read before this of any that were raised to life, yet Elijah, by a divine impulse, prays for the resurrection of this child, which yet will not warrant us to do the like; David expected not by fasting and prayer to bring his child back to life, *1 Sam. xii. 23.* but Elijah had a power to work miracles, which David had not; he *stretched himself upon the child*, to affect himself with the case, and to shew how much he was affected with it, and how desirous he was of the restoration of the child, he would if he could put life into him by his own breath and warmth; also to give a sign of what God would do by his power, and what he doth by his grace in the raising of dead souls to a spiritual life, the holy Ghost comes upon them, overshadows them, and puts life into them; he is very particular in his prayer, *I pray thee let this child's soul come into him again*; which plainly supposeth the existence of the soul in a state of separation from the body, and consequently its immortality; which Grotius thinks God designed by this miracle to give intimation and evidence of, for the encouragement of his suffering people.

4. The resurrection of the child, and the great satisfaction it gave to the mother; the child revived, *ver. 22.* See the power of prayer, and the power of him that hears prayer, who *kills and makes alive*; Elijah brought him to his mother, who, we may suppose, could scarce believe her own eyes, and therefore Elijah assures her it is her own, it is *thy son that liveth*, see it is thy own, and not another, *ver. 23.* The good woman hereupon cries out, *Now I know that thou art a man of God*; though she knew it before by the increase of her meal, yet the death of her child she took so unkindly, that she began to question it; a good man sure would not do her so ill a turn; but now she was abundantly satisfied, that he had both the power and goodness of a man of God; and will never doubt of it again, but give up herself to the conduct of his word, and the worship of the God of Israel. Thus the death of the child, like that of Lazarus, *John xi. 4.* was for the glory of God, and the honour of his prophet.

C H A P. XVIII.

We left the prophet Elijah wrapt up in obscurity; it doth not appear, that either the increase of the provision, or the raising of the child, had made him taken notice of at Zarephath, for then Ahab would have discovered him, he would rather do good, than be known to do it; but in this chapter, his appearance was as publick, as before his retirement was close; the days appointed for his concealment, (which was part of the Judgment upon Israel) being finished, he is now appointed to shew himself to Ahab, and expect rain upon the earth, ver. 1. Pursuant to this order we have here, 1. His interview with Obadiah, one of Ahab's servants, by whom he sends notice to Ahab of his coming, ver. 2—16. 2. His interview with Ahab himself, ver. 17—19. 3. His interview with all Israel upon mount Carmel, in order to a publick trial of titles between the Lord and Baal, and a famous solemnity it was, in which, (1.) Baal and his prophets were confounded. (2.) God and Elijah were honoured, ver. 21—39. 4. The execution he did upon the prophets of Baal, ver. 40. 5. The return of the mercy of rain at the word of Elijah, ver. 41—46. It is a chapter in which are many things very observable.

1. **A**ND it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go shew thy self unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. 2. And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab: and there was a sore famine in Samaria. 3. And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house: (now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly: 4. For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.) 5. And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we leave not all the beasts. 6. So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. 7. ¶ And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah? 8. And he answered him, I am: go tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. 9. And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab to slay me? 10. As the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he

took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. 11. And now thou sayest, Go tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. 12. And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the spirit of the LORD shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth. 13. Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the LORD? how I hid an hundred men of the LORD's prophets, by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water? 14. And now thou sayest, Go tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me. 15. And Elijah said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew my self unto him to day. 16. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

In these verses we find,

1. The sad state of Israel at this time, upon two accounts. 1. Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, *ver. 4.* *slew them*, *ver. 13.* Being an idolater, she was a persecutor, and made Ahab so. Even in those bad times, when the calves were worshipped, and the temple at Jerusalem deserted, yet there were some good people that feared God and served him, and some good prophets that instructed them in the knowledge of him, and assisted them in their devotions; the priests and Levites were all gone to Judah and Jerusalem, *2 Chron. xi. 13, 14.* but instead of them, God raised up these prophets, who read and expounded the law in private meetings, or in the families that retained their integrity, for we read not of any synagogues at this time; they had not the spirit of prophecy as Elijah, nor did they offer sacrifice or burn incense, but taught people to live well, and keep close to the God of Israel; these Jezebel aimed to extirpate, and put many of them to death, which was as much a publick calamity as a publick iniquity, and threatned the utter ruin of religion's poor remains in Israel; those few that escaped the sword, were forced to abscond, and hide themselves in caves, where they were buried alive, and cut off, though not from life, yet from usefulness, which is the end and comfort of life; and when the prophets were persecuted and driven into corners, no doubt their friends, those few good people that were in the land, were in like manner treated.

Yet as bad as things were, (1.) There was one very good man, that was a great man at court, Obadiah, who answers his name, a servant of the Lord, one that feared God, and was faithful to him, and yet was a steward of the household to Ahab; observe his character, he feared the Lord greatly, *ver. 3.* was not only a good man, but zealously and eminently good, his great place put a lustre upon his goodness, and gave him great opportunities of doing good, and he feared the Lord from his youth, *ver. 12.* he began betimes to be religious, and had continued long. Note, Early piety, it is to be hoped, will be eminent piety, those that are good betimes, are likely to be very good, he that feared God from his youth, came to fear him greatly; He that will thrive must rise at five.—But it is strange to find such an eminent good man governor of Ahab's house, an office of great honour, power, and trust. 1. It was strange so wicked a man as Ahab would prefer him to it, and continue him in it, certainly, it was because he was a man of celebrated honesty, industry, and ingenuity, and one whom he could repose a confidence in, whose eyes he could trust as much as his own, as appears here, *ver. 5.* Joseph and Daniel were preferred, because there were none so fit as they for the places they were preferred to. Note, Those who profess religion, should study to recommend themselves to the esteem even of those that are without, by their integrity, fidelity, and application to business. 2. It was strange, so good a man as Obadiah would accept of preferment in a court so addicted to idolatry, and all manner of wickedness. We may be sure it was not made necessary to qualify him for preferment, that he should be of the king's religion, that he should conform to the statutes of Omri, or the law of the house of Ahab; Obadiah would not have accepted the place, if he could not have had it without bowing the knee to Baal, nor was Ahab so impolitick, as to exclude those from offices that were fit to serve him, meerly because they would not join with him in his devotions; that man that is true to his God, will be faithful to his prince.—Obadiah therefore could with a good conscience enjoy the place, and therefore would not decline it, or give it up, though he foresaw he could not do the good he desired to do in it; they that fear God, need not go out of the world, as bad as it is. 3. It was strange, that either he did not reform Ahab, or Ahab corrupt him, but it seems they were both fixed, he that was filthy would be filthy still, and he that was holy would be holy still; those fear God greatly, that keep up the fear of him in bad times and places, thus Obadiah did; God has his remnant among all sorts, high and low, there were saints in Nero's household, and in Ahab's. —(2.) This great good man

used his power for the protection of God's prophets, he hid one hundred of them in two caves, when the persecution was hot, and *fed them with bread and water*, ver. 4. He did not think it enough to fear God himself, but having wealth and power wherewithal to do it, he thought himself obliged to assist and countenance others that feared God; nor did he think his being kind to them would excuse him from being good himself, but he did both, he both feared God greatly himself, and patronized those that feared him likewise. See how God wonderfully raiseth up friends for his ministers and people, for their shelter in difficult times, there where one would least expect them; bread and water were now scarce commodities, yet Obadiah will find a competency of both for God's prophets, to keep them alive for service hereafter, though now they were laid aside.

(2.) When Jezebel cut off God's prophets, God cut off their necessary provisions by the extremity of the drought. Perhaps Jezebel persecuted God's prophets under pretence that they were the cause of the judgment, because Elijah had foretold it, *Christians ad leones*; but God made them know the contrary, for the famine continued till Baal's prophets were sacrificed, and so great a scarcity of water there was, that the king himself and Obadiah went in person throughout the land to seek for grass for the cattle, ver. 5, 6.— Providence ordered it so, that Ahab might with his own eyes see how bad the consequences of this judgment were, that he might be the better inclined to hearken to Elijah, who would direct him into the only way to put an end to it; Ahab's care was not to *lose all the beasts*, many being already lost, but he took no care about his soul, not to lose that, took a deal of pains to seek grass, but none to seek the favour of God, fencing against the effect, but not enquiring how to remove the cause.—The land of Judah lay close to the land of Israel, yet we find no complaint there of the want of rain, for *Judah yet ruled with God, and was faithful with the saints and prophets*, Hof. xi. 12. By which distinction Israel might plainly have seen the ground of God's controversy, when God *caused it to rain upon one city and not upon another*, Amos iv. 7, 8. but they blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, and would not see.

2. The steps taken towards redress by Elijah's appearing again upon the stage to act as a Tishbite, a converter or reformer of Israel, for so (some think) that title of his signifies; *turn them again* to the Lord God of hosts, from whom they have revolted, and all will be well quickly; this must be Elijah's doings. See Luke i. 16, 17.

1. Ahab had made diligent search for him, so we find here, ver. 10. had offered rewards to any one that would discover him, sent spies *into every tribe and lordship* of his own dominions, as some understand it, or, as others, into all the neighbour nations and kingdoms that were in alliance with him; and when they denied that they knew any thing of him, he would not believe them unless they swore it, and, as should seem, promised likewise upon oath that if ever they found him among them, they would discover him and deliver him up.—It should seem, he made this diligent search for him, not so much that he might punish him for what he had done in denouncing the judgment, as that he might oblige him to undo it again, by recalling the sentence, because he had said it should be *according to his word*; having such an opinion of him as men foolishly conceive of witches, that if they can but compel them to bless that which they have bewitched, it will be well again, or such as the king of Moab had of Balaam; I incline to this, because we find when they came together, Elijah knowing what Ahab wanted him for, presently appointed him to meet him on mount Carmel, and Ahab complied with the appointment, though Elijah took such a way to revoke the sentence and bless the land as, perhaps, he little thought of.

2. God at length ordered Elijah to present himself to Ahab, because the time was now come when he would *send rain upon the earth*, ver. 1. or rather *upon the land*; above two years he had lain hid with the widow at Zarephath, after he had been concealed one year by the brook Cherith; so that the third year of his sojourning there here spoken of, ver. 1. was the fourth of the famine, which lasted in all three years and six months, as we find Luke iv. 25. James v. 17. Such was Elijah's zeal, no doubt, against the idolatry of Baal, and such his compassion to his people, that he thought it long to be thus confined to a corner, yet he appeared not till God bid him, *Go shew thy self to Ahab*, for now thine hour is come, even *the time to favour Israel*. Note, It bodes well to any people when God calls his ministers out of their corners and bids them shew themselves, a sign he will *give rain on the earth*, however we may the better dispense with the bread of affliction while *our eyes see our teachers*, Isa. xxx. 20, 21.

3. Elijah first surrendered, or rather discovered himself to Obadiah. He knew by the Spirit where to meet him, and we are here told what passed between them.

1. Obadiah saluted him with great respect, fell on his face, and humbly asked, *Art thou that my lord Elijah?* ver. 7. As he had shewed the tenderness of a father to the sons of the prophets, so he shewed the reverence of a son to this father of the prophets; and by this made it appear that he did indeed *fear God greatly*, that he did honour to one that was his extraordinary ambassador, and had a great interest in heaven.

2. Elijah in answer to him, (1.) Transfers the title of honour he gave him to Ahab; call him thy Lord, not me; that is a fitter title for a prince than for a prophet, *who seeks not honour from men*. Prophets should be called seers, and shepherds, and watchmen, and ministers, rather than lords; as those that mind duty more than dominion. (2.) He bids Obadiah go tell the king that he was there to speak with him. *Tell thy lord, behold Elijah is forth-coming*, ver. 8. He would have the king know before, that it might not be a surprise to him, and that he might be sure it was the prophet's own act to present himself to him.

3. Obadiah begs to be excused from carrying this message to Ahab, for it might prove as much as his neck was worth. (1.) He tells Elijah what great search Ahab had made for him, and how much his heart was upon it to find him out, ver. 10. (2.) He takes it for granted, that Elijah would again withdraw, ver. 12. *The spirit of the Lord shall carry thee*, (as it is likely he had done sometimes when Ahab thought he had been sure of him) *whither I know not*. See 2 Kings ii. 16. He thought Elijah was not in good earnest, when he bid him tell Ahab where he was, but intended only to expose the impotency of his malice; for he knew Ahab was not worthy to receive any kindness from the prophet, and it was not fit the prophet should receive any diskindness from him. (3.) He is sure Ahab would be so enraged at the disappointment, that he would put him to death, for making a fool of him, or for not laying hands on Elijah himself when he had him in his reach, ver. 12. tyrants and persecutors, in their passion, are oft unreasonably outrageous, even towards their friends and confidants. (4.) He pleads, that he did not deserve to be thus exposed and put in peril of his life, *What have I sinned?* ver. 9. Nay, ver. 13. *Was it not told my lord, how I hid the prophets?* He mentions this not in pride or ostentation, but to convince Elijah, that though he was Ahab's servant, he was not in his interest, and therefore deserved not to be bantered as one of the tools of his persecution. He that had protected so many prophets, he hoped, should not have his own life hazarded by so great a prophet.

4. Elijah satisfies him that he might with safety deliver this message to Ahab, by assuring him, with an oath, that he would this very day present himself to Ahab, ver. 15. Let but Obadiah know that he spoke seriously, and really intended it, and he will make no scruple to carry the message to Ahab. Elijah swears by *the Lord of hosts*, who has all power in his hands, and was therefore able to protect his servant against all the powers of hell and earth.

5. Notice is hereby soon brought to Ahab, that Elijah had sent him a challenge to meet him immediately at such a place, and Ahab accepts the challenge, *he went to meet Elijah*, ver. 16. We may suppose it a great surprise to Ahab to hear that Elijah, whom he had so long sought, and not found, was now found without seeking. He went in quest of grass, and finds him from whose word at God's mouth he must expect rain. Yet his guilty conscience gives him little reason to hope for it, but rather to fear some other more dreadful judgment. Had he by his spies surprised Elijah, he would have triumphed over him, but now he was thus surprised by him, we may suppose he even trembled to look him in the face; hated him, and yet feared him, as Herod did John.

17. ¶ And it came to pass when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, *Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* 18. And he answered, I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy fathers house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim. 19. Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. 20. So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel.

We have here the meeting between Ahab and Elijah; as ill a king as ever the world was plagued with, and as good a prophet as ever the church was blessed with.

1. Ahab, like himself, basely accuseth Elijah; dares not strike him, remembering that Jeroboam's hand was withered when it was stretched out against a prophet, but gives him ill language, which was no less an affront to him that sent him. It is a very coarse complement with which he accosts him, at the first word, *Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* ver. 17. How unlike was this to that with which his servant Obadiah saluted him, ver. 7. *Art thou that my lord Elijah?* Obadiah feared God greatly; Ahab had sold himself to work wickedness, and both discovered their character by the manner of their address to the prophet. One may guess how people stand affected to God, by observing how they stand affected to his people and ministers.—Elijah now came to bring blessings to Israel, tidings of the return of the rain; yet he is thus affronted. Had it been true that he was the *troubler of Israel*, Ahab, as king, had been obliged to animadvert upon him. There are those who trouble Israel by their wickedness, whom

the conservators of the publick peace are concerned to enquire after: But it was utterly false concerning Elijah; so far was he from being an enemy to Israel's welfare, that he was the stay of it, *the chariots and horsemen of Israel*. Note, It has been the lot of the best and most useful men, to be called and counted the troublers of the land, and to be run upon, and run down as publick grievances. Even Christ and his apostles were thus misrepresented, *Acts xvii. 6*.

2. Elijah, like himself, boldly returned the charge upon the king, and proved it upon him, that he was *the troubler of Israel*, ver. 18. Elijah is not the Achan, *I have not troubled Israel*, have neither done them any wrong, nor designed them any hurt. They that procure God's judgments, do the mischief, not he that foretels them only, and gives warning of them, that the nation may repent and prevent them. *I would have healed Israel, but they would not be healed*. Ahab is the Achan, the troubler, who follows Baalim, those accursed things. Nothing creates more trouble to a land, than the impiety and profaneness of princes and their families.

3. As one having authority immediately from the King of kings, he orders a convention of the states to be forthwith summoned, to meet at mount Carmel, where there had been an altar built to God, ver. 30. Probably, on that mountain, they had had an eminent high place, where formerly the pure worship of God had been kept up as well as it could be any where but at Jerusalem. Thither all Israel must come to give Elijah the meeting, and the prophets of Baal, who were dispersed all the country over, with those of the groves that were Jezebel's domestick chaplains, must there make their personal appearance.

4. Ahab issues out writs accordingly for the convening of this great assembly, ver. 20. either because he feared Elijah, and durst not oppose him; Saul stood in awe of Samuel more than of God: Or because he hoped Elijah would bless the land, and speak the word that they might have rain, and upon those terms they would be all at his beck. Those that slighted and hated his counsels, would gladly be beholden to him for his prayers. Now God *made those who said they were Jews and were not, but were of the synagogue of Satan, to come, and in effect, to worship at his feet, and to know that God had loved him*, Rev. iii. 9.

21. And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. 22. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. 23. Let them therefore give us two bullocks, and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: 24. And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. 25. And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for your selves, and dress it first; for ye are many: and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under. 26. And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leapt upon the altar which was made. 27. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god, either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. 28. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. 29. And it came to pass, when mid-day was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice; that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. 30. And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him: and he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down. 31. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name. 32. And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. 33. And he put the

wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt-sacrifice, and on the wood. 34. And he said, Do it the second time: And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time: And they did it the third time. 35. And the water ran round about the altar, and he filled the trench also with water. 36. And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day, that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. 37. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. 38. Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, and the wood; and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 39. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD he is the God; the LORD he is the God. 40. And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal, let not one of them escape: and they took them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.

Ahab and the people expected that Elijah should in this solemn assembly bless the land, and pray for rain, but he has other work to do first: The people must be brought to repent and reform, and then they may look for the removal of the judgment, but not till then. This is the right method; God will first prepare our heart, and then cause his ear to hear; will first turn us to him, and then turn to us, Psal. x. 17. lxxx. 3. Deserters must not look for God's favour, till they return to their allegiance. Elijah might have looked for rain seventy times seven times, and not have seen it, if he had not thus began his work at the right end.

Three years and a half's famine would not bring them back to God, Elijah will endeavour to convince their judgments; and, no doubt, by special warrant and direction from heaven, he put the controversy between God and Baal upon a publick trial. It was great condescension in God, that he would suffer so plain a case to be disputed; and would permit Baal to be a competitor with him; but thus God would have every mouth to be stopped, and all flesh to become silent before him. God's cause is so uncontestedly just, that it needs not fear to have the evidences of its equity searched into, and weighed.

1. Elijah reproves the people for mixing the worship of God, and the worship of Baal together. Not only some Israelites worshipped God, and others Baal, but the same Israelites sometimes worshipped one, and sometimes the other. This he calls, ver. 21. *Halting between two opinions*, or thoughts. They worshipped God to please the prophets, but worshipped Baal to please Jezebel, and curry favour at court. They thought to trim the matter, and play on both sides, as the Samaritans, 2 Kings xvii. 33. Now Elijah shews them the absurdity of this; he doth not insist upon their relation to Jehovah. Is he not yours, and the God of your fathers, but Baal the god of the Sidonians, and will a nation change their God? Jer. ii. 11. No, he waves the prescription, and enters upon the merits of the cause: there can be but one God, but one infinite, and but one supream: There needs but one God, one omnipotent, one all-sufficient: What occasion for addition to that which is perfect? Now if upon trial, it appear, that Baal is that one infinite, omnipotent being, that one supream lord and all-sufficient benefactor, you ought to renounce Jehovah, and cleave to Baal only: But if Jehovah be that one God, Baal is a cheat, and you must have no more to do with him. Note, 1. It is a very ill thing to halt between God and Baal. "In reconcileable differences" (saith bishop Hall) nothing more safe than indifferency both of practice and opinion; but in cases of so necessary hostility, as betwixt God and Baal, He that is not with God, is against him, compare Mark ix. 38, 39. with Matt. xii. 30. — The service of God, and the service of sin, the dominion of Christ, and the dominion of our lusts, these are the two thoughts which it is dangerous halting between. Those do so, that are unresolved under their convictions; unstable and unsteady in their purposes; promise fair, but do not perform; begin well, but do not hold on; that are inconsistent with themselves, indifferent and lukewarm in that which is good. Their heart is divided, Hof. x. 2. whereas God will have all or none. 2. We are fairly put to our choice whom we will serve, Josh. xxiv. 15. If we can find one that has more right to us, or will be a better master to us than God, we may take him at our peril. God demands no more from us, than he can make out a title to.

This fair proposal of the case which Elijah here makes, the people knew not what to say to, they answered him not a word. They

They could say nothing to justify themselves, and they would say nothing to condemn themselves, but as people confounded, let him say what he would.

2. He proposeth to bring the matter to a fair trial; and it was so much the fairer, because Baal had all the external advantages on his side: The king and court were all for Baal; so was the body of the people. The managers of Baal's cause were four hundred and fifty men, fat and well fed, *ver. 22.* besides four hundred more their supporters or seconds, *ver. 19.* The manager of God's cause was but one man; lately a poor exile; hardly kept from starving; so that God's cause has nothing to support it but its own right. However, it is put to this experiment; Let each side prepare a sacrifice; and pray to its God, and *the God that answereth by fire, let him be God*; if neither did, let them turn atheist; if both, let them continue to *balt between two.* Elijah, doubtless, had a special commission from God, to put it to this, else he had tempted God; and affronted religion; but the case was extraordinary; and the judgment upon it would be of use, not only then, but in all ages. It is an instance of the courage of Elijah; that he durst stand alone in the cause of God against such powers and numbers; and the issue encourages all God's witnesses and advocates, never to fear the face of man. Elijah doth not say, The God that answers by water, though that was the thing the country needed, but that *answers by fire, let him be God*, because the atonement was to be made by sacrifice, before the judgment could be removed in mercy. The God therefore that has power to pardon sin, and to signify that by consuming the sin offering, must needs be the God that can relieve us against the calamity. He that can give fire, can give rain, see *Matt. ix. 2.*

3. The people join issue with him: *It is well spoken*, *ver. 24.* They allow the proposal to be fair, and unexceptionable. God had used to answer by fire; if Baal cannot do so, let him be cast off for an usurper. They were very desirous to see the experiment tried, and seemed resolved to abide by the issue, whatever it should be. They that were firm for God, doubted not but it would end to his honour: They that were indifferent, were willing to be determined. And Ahab, and the prophets of Baal, durst not oppose for fear of the people, and hoped that either they could obtain fire from heaven (though they never had yet) and the rather because, as some think, they worshipped the sun in Baal; or that Elijah could not, because not at the temple, where God used thus to manifest his glory: And if in this trial, they could but bring it to a drawn battle, their other advantages would give them the victory. Let it go on therefore to a trial.

4. The prophets of Baal try first, but try in vain, with their God. They covet the precedence, not only for the honour of it; but that if they could but in the least seem to gain their point, Elijah might not be admitted to make the trial. Elijah allows it them, *ver. 25.* gives them the leading, for their greater confusion; only knowing that the working of Satan is with lying wonders, he takes care to prevent a fraud, be sure to *put fire under.* Now in their experiment, observe,

1. How importunate and noisy the prophets of Baal were in their applications to him. They got their sacrifice ready; and we may well imagine what a noise four hundred and fifty men made, when they cried as one man, and with all their might, *O Baal, hear us; O Baal, answer us*; as it is in the margin: And this for some hours together, longer than Diana's worshippers made their outcry, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians*, *Acts xix. 34.* How senseless, how brutish were they in their addresses to Baal! 1. Like fools, *they leaped upon the altar*, as if they would themselves become sacrifices with their bullock: Or, thus they expressed their great earnestness of mind. *They leaped up and down*, or danced about the altar; so some hoped by their dancing to please their deity, as Herodias did Herod, and so to obtain their request. 2. Like madmen they *cut themselves in pieces with knives and lancets*, *ver. 28.* for vexation that they were not answered, or in a sort of prophetick fury, hoping to obtain the favour of their god, by offering to him their own blood, when they could not do it with the blood of their bullock. God never required his worshippers thus to honour him; but the service of the devil, though in some instances it pleaseth and pampereth the body, yet in other things it is really cruel to it, as in envy, and drunkenness. It seems, this was the manner of the worshippers of Baal: God expressly forbid his worshippers to cut themselves, *Deut. xiv. 1.* He insists upon it; that we mortify our lusts and corruptions; but corporal penances and severities, such as the Papists use, which have no tendency to that, are no pleasure to him: *Who has required these things at your hands?*

2. How sharp Elijah was upon them, *ver. 27.* He stood by them, and patiently heard them for so many hours praying to an idol, yet with secret indignation and disdain; and at noon, when the sun was at the hottest, and they too, expecting fire, then if ever: he upbraided them with their folly; and notwithstanding, the gravity of his office, and the seriousness of the work he had before him, bantered them. *Cry aloud, for he is a god*; a goodly god that cannot be made to hear without all this clamour. Sure you think he is talking or meditating, (as the word is) or

he is pursuing some deep thoughts, in a brown study, (as we say) thinking of somewhat else, and not minding his own matter, when not your credit only, but all his honour lies at stake, and his interest in Israel. His new conquests will be lost, if he do not look about him quickly. Note, The worship of idols is a most ridiculous thing, and it is but justice to represent it so, and expose it to scorn. This will by no means justify those who ridicule the worshippers of God in Christ, because the worship is not performed just in their way.—Baal's prophets were so far from being convinced and put to shame by the just reproach Elijah cast upon them, that it made them the more violent; and act more ridiculously. *A deceived heart having turned them aside, they could not deliver their souls*, by saying, *Is there not a lie in our right hand?*

3. How deaf Baal was to them. Elijah did not interrupt them, but let them go on till they were tired, and quite despaired of success, which was not *till the time of the evening sacrifice*, *ver. 29.* During all that time, some of them prayed, while others of them prophesied, sang hymns, perhaps to the praise of Baal; or rather, encouraged those that were praying to proceed, telling them; Baal would answer them at last, but there was *no answer, nor any that regarded.* Idols could do neither good nor evil. The prince of the power of the air, if God had permitted him, could have caused *fire to come down from heaven* on this occasion, and gladly would have done it for the support of his Baal. We find the beast that deceives the world doth it, *Rev. xiii. 13.* *He maketh fire come down from heaven in the sight of men*, and so deceiveth them, *ver. 14.* But God would not suffer the devil to do it now, because the trial of his title was put on that issue by consent of parties.

5. Elijah soon obtains from his God an answer by fire. The Baalites are forced to give up their cause, and now it is Elijah's turn to produce his: Let us see if he speed better.

(1.) He fitted up an altar. He would not make use of theirs, which had been polluted with their prayers to Baal, but finding the ruins of an altar there, which had formerly been used in the service of the Lord, he chose to repair that. *ver. 30.* to intimate to them that he was not about to introduce any new religion, but to revive the faith and worship of their fathers God, and reduce them to their first love, their first works. He could not bring them to the altar at Jerusalem, unless he could have united the two kingdoms again, (which for correction to both, God designed should not now be done) therefore by his prophetic authority, he built an altar on mount Carmel, and so owns that which had formerly been built there. When we cannot carry a reformation so far as we would, we must do what we can, and rather comply with some corruptions, than not do our utmost towards the extirpation of Baal. He repaired this altar with *twelve stones, according to the number of the twelve tribes*, *ver. 31.* Though ten of the tribes were revolted to Baal, he will look upon them as belonging to God still, by virtue of the ancient covenant with their fathers: And though those ten were unhappily divided from the other two in civil interest, yet in the worship of the God of Israel, they had communion with each other, and they twelve were one. Mention is made of God's calling their father Jacob, by the name of Israel, *a prince with God*, *ver. 31.* to shame his degenerate seed, who worshipped a god that they saw could not hear or answer them, and to encourage the prophet, who was now to wrestle with God, as Jacob did, he also shall be a prince with God, *Psal. xxiv. 6.* *Thy face, O Jacob.* *Hos. xii. 4.* *There he spake with us.*

(2.) Having built his altar *in the name of the Lord*, *ver. 32.* by direction from him, and with an eye to him, and not for his own honour, he prepared his sacrifice, *ver. 33.* *Behold the bullock and the wood; but where is the fire?* *Gen. xxii. 7.* *God will provide himself fire.* If we in sincerity offer our hearts to God, he will by his grace kindle a holy fire in them. Elijah was no priest, nor his attendants Levites; Carmel had neither tabernacle nor temple, it was a great way distant from the ark of the testimony, and the place God had chosen, this was none of the altar that sanctified the gift, yet never was any sacrifice more acceptable to God than this. The particular Levitical institutions were so oft dispensed with, as in the time of the Judges, Samuel's time, and now, that one would be tempted to think they were more designed for types to be fulfilled in the evangelical anti-types, than for laws to be fulfilled in the strict observance of them. Their perishing thus in the using, as the apostle speaks of them, *Col. ii. 22.* was to intimate the utter abolishing of them after a while, *Heb. viii. 13.*

(3.) He ordered abundance of water to be poured upon his altar, which he had prepared a trench for the reception of, *ver. 32.* and some think, made the altar hollow. Twelve barrels of water, (probably sea water, for the sea was near, and so much fresh water in this time of drought, was too precious for him to be so prodigal of) thrice four he poured upon his sacrifice, to prevent the suspicion of any fire under; for if there had been any, this would have put it out; and to make the expected miracle the more illustrious.

(4.) He then solemnly addressed himself to God by prayer before his altar, humbly beseeching him to *turn to ashes his burnt-offering*,

offering; as the phrase is, *Psal. xx. 3.* and so to testify his acceptance of it. His prayer is not long, for he used no vain repetitions, nor thought he should be *heard for his much speaking*; but it is very grave and composed, and speaks his mind calm and sedate, and far from the heats and disorders that Baal's prophets were in, *ver. 36, 37.* Though he was not at the place appointed, he chose the appointed time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, thereby to testify his communion with the altar at Jerusalem. Though he expected an answer by fire, yet he came near to the altar with boldness, and feared not that fire. He addressed himself to God, as *the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel*, acting faith on God's ancient covenant, and minding the people too (for prayer may prevail) of their relation both to God, and to the patriarchs. Two things he pleads here, (1.) The glory of God; Lord, hear me, and answer me, *that it may be known* (for it is now by the most denied or forgotten) *that thou art God in Israel*, to whom alone the homage and devotion of Israel is due; and *that I am thy servant*, and do all I have done, am doing, and shall do, as thine agent, *at thy word*, and not to gratify any humour or passion of my own. Thou employest me, Lord, make it appear that thou dost so, see *Numb. xvi. 28, 29.* Elijah sought not his own glory, but in subserviency to God's, and for his own necessary vindication. 2. The edification of the people, *that they may know that thou art the Lord*, and may experience thy grace, *turning their heart*, by this miracle as a means, *back again to thee*, in order to thy return in a way of mercy to them.

(3.) God immediately answered him by fire, *ver. 38.* Elijah's God was neither talking, nor pursuing, needed not to be either awakened or quickened; while he was yet speaking, *the fire of the Lord fell*, and not only, as at other times, (*Lev. ix. 24. 1 Chron. xxi. 26. 2 Chron. vii. 1.*) consumed the sacrifice and the wood, in token of God's acceptance of the offering, but *licked up all the water in the trench*, exhaling that, and drawing it up as a vapour, in order to the intended rain, which was to be the fruit of this sacrifice and prayer, more than the product of natural causes. Compare *Psal. cxxxv. 7.* *He causeth vapours to ascend, and maketh lightnings for the rain*; for this rain he did both. Those who fall as victims to the fire of God's wrath, no water can shelter them from it, no more than briars or thorns, *Isa. xxvii. 4, 5.* But this was not all, to compleat the miracle, the fire consumed the stones of the altar, and the very dust, to shew that it was no ordinary fire, and, perhaps, to intimate, that though God accepted this occasional sacrifice from this altar, yet for the future, they ought to demolish all the altars on their high places, and for their constant sacrifices make use of that at Jerusalem only. Moses's altar and Solomon's were consecrated by the fire from heaven, but that was destroyed, because no more to be used.—We may well imagine what a terror the fire struck on guilty Ahab, and all the worshippers of Baal, and how they fled from it as far and as fast as they could, saying, *Left it consume as also*, alluding to *Numb. xvi. 34.*

Lastly, What was the result of this fair trial. The prophets of Baal had failed in their proof, and could give no evidence at all, to make out their pretensions on the behalf of their God, but were perfectly non-suited; Elijah, had by the most convincing and undeniable evidence, proved his claims on the behalf of the God of Israel.

And now, 1. The people, as the jury, give in their verdict upon the trial, and they are all agreed in it; the case is so plain, they need not go from the bar to consider of their verdict, or consult about it, *they fell on their faces*, and all as one man said, *Jehovah, he is the God*, and not Baal; we are convinced and satisfied of it, *Jehovah, he is the God*, *ver. 39.* From whence one would think they should have inferred, if he be the God, he shall be our God, and we will serve him only, as *Josh. xxiv. 24.* Some, we hope, had their hearts thus turned back, but the generality of them were convinced only, not converted; yielded to the truth of God, that he is the God, but consented not to his covenant, that he should be theirs. Blessed are they that have not seen what they saw, and yet have believed, and been wrought upon by it, more than they that saw it. Let it for ever be looked upon as a point adjudged against all pretenders, for it was carried upon a full hearing, against one of the most daring and threatening competitors, that ever the God of Israel was affronted by, that *Jehovah, he is God*, God alone.

2. The prophets of Baal, as criminals, are seized, condemned, and executed according to law, *ver. 40.* If Jehovah be the true God, Baal is a false God to whom these Israelites had revolted, and seduced others to the worship of him, and therefore by the express law of God, they were to be put to death, *Deut. xiii. 1—11.* There needed no proof of the fact, all Israel were witnesses of it, and therefore Elijah (acting still by an extraordinary commission, which is not to be drawn into a precedent) orders them all to be slain immediately, as the troublers of the land, and Ahab himself is so terrified, for the present, with the fire from heaven, that he dares not oppose it. These were the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, the four hundred prophets of the groves (who some think were Sidonians) though summoned, *ver. 19.* yet as it should seem did not attend, and so escaped this

execution, which fair escape, perhaps, Ahab and Jezebel thought themselves happy in; but it proved, they were reserved to be the instruments of Ahab's destruction some time after, by encouraging him to go up to Ramoth-Gilead, *chap. xxii. 6.*

41. ¶ And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink, for *there is* a sound of abundance of rain. 42. So Ahab went up to eat and to drink, and Elijah went up to the top of Carmel, and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, 43. And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, *There is* nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. 44. And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. 45. And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel. 46. And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab, to the entrance of Jezreel.

Israel being thus far reformed, that they had acknowledged the Lord to be God, and had consented to the execution of Baal's prophets, that they might not seduce them any more, though it was far short of a thorough reformation, yet was so far accepted, that God thereupon opened the bottles of heaven, and poured out blessings upon his land, that very evening (as it should seem) that they did this good work, which should have confirmed them in their reformation, see *Hag. ii. 18, 19.*

1. Elijah sends Ahab to eat and drink, for joy, that God had now accepted his works, and rain was coming, see *Ecclef. ix. 7.* Ahab had continued fasting all day, either religiously, it being a day of prayer; or for want of leisure, it being a day of great expectation; but now let him eat and drink, for though others perceive no sign of it, Elijah by faith hears the sound of abundance of rain, *ver. 41.* God revealeth his secrets to his servants the prophets; and yet with a revelation we may foresee, that when man's judgment runs down like a river, God's mercy will. Rain is the river of God, *Psal. lxxv. 9.*

2. He himself retires to pray (for though God has promised rain, he must ask it, *Zech. x. 1.*) and to give thanks for God's answer by fire, now hoping for an answer by water. What he said we are not told: But, (1.) He withdrew himself to an odd place, to the top of Carmel, which was very high, and very private. Hence we read of those that hide themselves in the top of Carmel, *Amos ix. 3.* There he would be alone. Those who are called to appear and act in publick for God, must yet find time to be private with him, and keep up their converse with him in solitude. There he set himself as it were upon his watch tower, like the prophet, *Hab. ii. 1.* (2.) He put himself into a very odd posture; he cast himself down on his knees upon the earth, in token of humility, reverence, and importunity, and put his face between his knees, i. e. bowed his head so low, that it touched his knees, thus abasing himself in the sense of his own meanness, now God had thus honoured him.

3. He orders his servant to bring him notice as soon as he discerned a cloud arising out of the sea, the Mediterranean sea, which he had a large prospect of from the top of Carmel. The sailors at this day call it Cape Carmel. Six times his servant goes to the point of the hill, and sees nothing, brings no good news to his master, yet Elijah continues praying, will not be diverted so far as to go and see with his own eyes, but still sends his servant to see if he could discover any hopeful cloud, while he keeps his mind close and intent in prayer, and abides by it, as one that had taken up his father Jacob's resolution, *I will not let thee go, except thou blest me.* Note, Though the answer of our fervent and believing supplications do not come presently, yet we must continue instant in prayer, and not faint or give off, for at the end it shall speak and not lie.

4. A little cloud at length appears, no bigger than a man's hand, which presently overspreads the heavens, and waters the earth, *ver. 44, 45.* Great blessings often arise from small beginnings, and showers of plenty from a cloud of a span long. Let us therefore never despise the day of small things, but hope and wait for great things from it. This was not as a morning cloud, which passeth away, though Israel's goodness was so, but one that produced a plentiful rain, *Psal. lxxviii. 9.* and an earnest of more.

5. Elijah hereupon hastens Ahab home, and attends him himself. Ahab rode in his chariot, at ease, and in state, *ver. 45.* Elijah run on foot before him. If Ahab had paid the respect to Elijah that he deserved, he should have taken him into his chariot, as the eunuch did Philip, that he might honour him before the elders of Israel, and confer with him farther about the reformation of the kingdom: But his corruptions got the better of

of his convictions, and he was glad to get clear of him, as Felix of Paul, when he dismissed him, and adjourned his conference with him to a more convenient season. But since Ahab invites him not to ride with him, he will *run before him*, ver. 46. as one of his footmen, that he might not seem to be lifted up with the great honour God had put upon him, or to abate in his civil respects to his prince, though he reprov'd him faithfully. God's ministers should make it appear, that how great soever they look when they deliver God's messages, yet they are far from affecting worldly grandeur: Let them leave that to the kings of the earth.

C H A P. XIX.

We left Elijah at the entrance of Jezreel, still appearing publicly, and all the peoples eyes upon him. In this chapter we have him again absconding, and driven into obscurity, at a time when he could ill have been spared; but we are to look upon it as a punishment to Israel, for the insincerity and inconstancy of their reformation. When people will not learn, it is just with God to remove their teachers into corners. Now observe, (1.) How he was driven into banishment by the malice of Jezebel, his sworn enemy, ver. 1—3. (2.) How he was met in his banishment by the favour of God, his covenant friend. 1. How he fed him, ver. 4—8. 2. How he conversed with him, and manifested himself to him, ver. 9, 11, 12, 13. heard his complaint, ver. 10, 14. directed him what to do, ver. 15, 16, 17. and encouraged him, ver. 18. 3. How his hands were strengthened at his return out of banishment, by the joining of Elijah with him, ver. 19—21.

1. **A**ND Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal, how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. 2. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them, by to-morrow about this time. 3. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which *belongeth* to Judah, and left his servant there. 4. ¶ But he himself went a days journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper-tree: and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is enough, now, O LORD, take away my life: for I am not better than my fathers. 5. And as he lay and slept under a juniper-tree, behold then, an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. 6. And he looked, and behold, *there was* a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head: and he did eat, and drink, and laid him down again. 7. And the angel of the LORD come again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee. 8. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights, unto Horeb the mount of God.

One would have expected, after such a publick and sensible manifestation of the glory of God, and such a clear decision of the controversy depending between him and Baal, to the honour of Elijah, the confusion of Baal's prophets, and the universal satisfaction of the people; after they had seen both fire and water come from heaven at the prayer of Elijah, and both in mercy to them; the one as it signified the acceptance of their offering, the other as it *refreshed their inheritance, which was weary*, that now they should all as one man have returned to the worship of the God of Israel, and taken Elijah for their guide and oracle, that he should from thenceforward have been prime minister of state, and his directions laws both to king and kingdom. But it is quite otherwise; he is neglected whom God honoured; no respect is paid him, no care taken of him, nor any use made of him, but on the contrary, the land of Israel, to which he had been, and might have been so great a blessing, is soon made too hot for him.

1. Ahab incensed Jezebel against him. That queen consort, it seems, was in effect queen-regent, as she was afterwards when she was queen-dowager; an imperious woman that managed king and kingdom, and did what she would. Ahab's conscience would not let him persecute Elijah, some remains he had in him of the blood and spirit of an Israelite, which tied his hands, but he told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, *ver. 1.* not to convince but to exasperate her. It is not said he told her what God had done, but what Elijah had done, as if he by some spell or charm had brought fire from heaven, and the hand of the Lord had not been in it. Especially he represented to her, as that which would make her outrageous against him, that he had slain the prophets; the prophets of Baal he calls the prophets, as if none but they were worthy of the name. Those were they his heart was upon, and he aggravates the slaying of them as Elijah's crime, without taking notice that it was a just reprisal upon her for killing God's prophets, *chap. xviii. 4.* Those who when they cannot for shame or fear do mischief themselves, yet stir up others to do it,

will have it laid to their charge, as if they had themselves done it.

1. Jezebel sent him a threatening message, *ver. 2.* that she had vowed and sworn to be the death of him within twenty-four hours. Something diverting her that she could not have it done just now, but she resolves it shall not be long undone. Note, Carnal hearts are hardened and enraged against God by that which should convince and conquer them, and bring them into subjection to him. She swears by her gods many, and raging like one distracted, curseth herself if she slay not him, without any proviso of a divine permission. Cruelty and confidence oft meet in persecutors. *I will pursue; I will overtake*, Exod. xv. 9. But how came she to send him word of her design, and so to give him an opportunity of making his escape? Did she think him so daring, that he would not flee? Or herself able to prevent it? Or was there a special providence in it, that she should be thus infatuated by her own fury? I am apt to think, though she desired nothing more than his blood, yet at this time she durst not meddle with him, *for fear of the people, all counting him a prophet*, a great prophet; and therefore sent this message to him purely to frighten him, and get him out of the way for the present, that he might not carry on what he had begun. The backing of her threats with an oath and imprecation, doth not at all prove that she really intended it, but only intended to make him believe it. The gods she swore by, could do her no harm.

3. Elijah hereupon in a great fright, fled for his life, it is likely by night, and came to Beer-sheba, *ver. 3.* Shall we praise him for this? We praise him not. Where was the courage with which he had lately confronted Ahab, and all the prophets of Baal? Nay, which kept him by his sacrifice when the fire of God fell upon it? He that stood undaunted in the midst of the terrors both of heaven and earth, trembles at the impotent menaces of a proud passionate woman. *Lord, What is man?* Great faith is not always alike strong. He could not but know that he might be very serviceable to Israel at this juncture, and had all the reason in the world to depend upon God's protection while he was doing God's work, yet he flies. In his former danger, God had bid him hide himself, *chap. xvii. 3.* therefore he supposed he might do it now.

4. From Beer-sheba he went forward into the wilderness, that vast howling wilderness in which the Israelites wandred. Beer-sheba was so far distant from Jezreel, and within the dominion of so good a king as Jehoshaphat, that he could not but be safe there; yet as if his fears haunted him, even then when he was out of the reach of danger, he cannot rest there, but went a days journey into the desert. Yet perhaps he retired thither, not so much for his safety as that he might be wholly retired from the world, in order to a more free and intimate communion with God. *He left his servant at Beer-sheba*, that he might be private in the wilderness, as Abraham left his servants at the bottom of the hill when he went up into the mount to worship God; and as Christ in the garden was *withdrawn from his disciples*: Or perhaps it was because he would not expose his servant, who was young and tender, to the hardships of the wilderness: that would be putting new wine into old bottles. We ought thus to consider the frame of those who are under our charge, for God considers ours.

5. Being wearied with his journey, he grew cross, (like children when they are sleepy) and *wished he might die*, *ver. 4.* He *requested for his life*, (so it is in the margin) *that he might die*; for death is life to a good man; the death of the body is the life of the soul. Yet that was not the reason why he wished to die; it was not the deliberate desire of grace, as Paul's, to *depart and be with Christ*, but the passionate wish of his corruption, as Job's. Those that are in this manner forward to die, are not in fittest frame for it. Jezebel has sworn his death, and therefore he in a fret, prays for it, runs from death to death, yet with this difference, he wishes to die by the hand of the Lord, whose tender mercies are great, and not to fall into the hands of man, whose tender mercies are cruel. He would rather die in the wilderness, than as Baal's prophets died, according to Jezebel's threatening, *ver. 2.* lest the worshippers of Baal triumph, and blaspheme the God of Israel, whom they will think themselves too hard for, if they can run down his advocate. He pleads it is enough, I have done enough, and suffered enough, I am weary of living. Those that have made such a happiness in the other world, will soon have enough of this world.—He pleads *I am not better than my fathers*; not better able to bear those fatigues, and therefore why should I be longer burthened with them than they were? But is this *that my lord Elijah?* Can that great and gallant spirit sneak thus? God thus left him to himself, to shew him, that when he was bold and strong, it was *in the Lord*, and *the power of his might*, but of himself he was *no better than his fathers*, or brethren.

6. God by an angel fed him in that wilderness, into the wants and perils of which he had wilfully thrown himself, and in which, if God had not graciously succoured him, he had perished. How much better doth God deal with his froward children than they deserve! Elijah in a pet wished to die: God needed him not, yet designed farther to employ and honour him,

and therefore sent an angel to *keep him alive*. Our case would be bad sometimes, if God should take us at our word, and grant us our foolish passionate requests. Having prayed he might die, he *laid down and slept*, ver. 5. wishing it may be to die in his sleep, and not to wake again; but he is wakened out of his sleep, and finds himself not only well provided for with bread and water, ver. 6. but, which was more, attended by an angel, who guarded him when he slept, called him to his victuals when they were ready for him, ver. 5. and a second time, ver. 7. He needed not complain of the unkindnesses of men, when it was thus made up by the ministration of angels. Thus provided for, he had reason to think he fared better than the *prophets of the groves*, that *did eat at Jezebel's table*. Wherever God's children are, as they are still upon their Father's ground, so they are still under their Father's eye and care. They may lose themselves in a wilderness, but God has not left them; there they may *look at him that lives and sees them, as Hagar*, Gen. xvi. 13.

Lastly, He is carried in the strength of this meat to Horeb, *the mount of God*, ver. 8. Thither the spirit of the Lord led him, probably beyond his own intention, that he might have communion with God in the same place where Moses had, the law that was given by Moses being revived by him. The angel bid him eat the second time, because of the greatness of the journey that was before him, ver. 7. Note, God knows what he designs us for, though we do not, what services, what trials, and will take care for us, when we for want of foresight cannot for ourselves, that we be furnished for them with *grace sufficient*. He that appoints what the voyage shall be, will victual the ship accordingly. See how many different ways God took to keep Elijah alive; fed him by ravens, with multiplied meal, by an angel, and now, to shew that *Man lives not by bread alone*, he kept him alive forty days without meat, not resting and sleeping, which might make him the less to crave sustenance, but continually traversing the mazes of the desert, a day for a year of Israel's wanderings, yet he neither needs food, nor desires it. The place, no doubt, minds him of the manna, and encourages him to hope, that God would sustain him here, and in due time bring him hence, as he did Israel, though, like him, fretful and distrustful.

9. ¶ And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, and he said unto him, What dost thou here, Elijah? 10. And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only am left, and they seek my life, to take it away. 11. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: 12. And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire, a still small voice. 13. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entring in of the cave: and behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What dost thou here, Elijah? 14. And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword: and I, even I only am left, and they seek my life, to take it away. 15. And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. 16. And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. 17. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael, shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu, shall Elisha slay. 18. Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

Here is, 1. Elijah housed in a cave at mount Horeb, which is called *the mount of God*, because on it God had formerly manifested his glory. And, perhaps, this was the same cave or cleft of a rock, in which Moses was hid when the Lord *passed by before him, and proclaimed his name*, Exod. xxxiii. 22. What Elijah proposed to himself in coming to lodge here, I cannot conceive, unless it were either to indulge his melancholy, or to

satisfy his curiosity, and assist his faith and devotion with the light of that famous place where the law was given, and so many great things were done, and hoping to meet with God himself, there where Moses met with him: Or, in token of his abandoning his people Israel, who hated to be reformed; and so it agrees with Jeremiah's wish, *Jer. ix. 2. O that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men, that I might leave my people, and go from them, for they be all adulterous*; and so it was a bad omen of God's forsaking them. Or, it was because he thought he could not be safe any where else; and to this instance of the hardships this good man was reduced to, the apostle refers, *Heb. xi. 38. They wandered in deserts and in mountains, in dens and caves of the earth*.

2. The visit God made him there, and the enquiry he made concerning him; *The word of the Lord came to him*. We cannot go any whither to be out of the reach of God's eye, his arm, and his word. *Whither can I flee from thy Spirit?* Psal. cxxxix. 7, &c. God will take care of his out-casts; and those that for his sake are driven out from among men, he will find and own, and gather with everlasting loving-kindnesses. St. John saw the visions of the Almighty, when he was in banishment in the isle of Patmos, *Rev. i. 9*.

The question God puts to him is, *What dost thou here, Elijah?* ver. 9. and again, ver. 13. This is a reproof, 1. For his fleeing thither. What brings thee so far from home? Dost thou flee from Jezebel? Couldst thou not depend upon almighty power for thy protection? Lay the emphasis upon [thou]. What thou? So great a man, so great a prophet, so famed for resolution, dost thou run thy country, run thy colours thus? This cowardise had been more excusable in another, and not so ill an example. *Should such a man as I am flee?* Neh. vi. 11. *Howl fir-trees, if the cedars be thus shaken*. 2. For his fixing here. What dost thou here in this cave? Is this a place for a prophet of the Lord to lodge in? Is this a time for such men to retreat, when the publick has such need of them? In Elijah's retirement that God sent him to, chap. xvii. he was a blessing to a poor widow at Sarepta, but here he had no opportunity of doing good. Note, It concerns us often to enquire, whether we be in our place, and in the way of our duty. Am I where I should be? Whither God calls me, where my business lies, and where I may be useful?

3. The account he gives of himself in answer to the question put to him, ver. 10. and repeated in answer to the same question, ver. 14. In which, (1.) He excuses his retreat, and desires it may not be imputed to his want of zeal for reformation, but to his despair of success. For God knew, and his own conscience witnessed for him, that as long as there was any hopes of doing good, he had been *very jealous for the Lord God of hosts*; but now he had *laboured in vain*, and all his endeavours were to no purpose, he thought it was time to give up the cause, and mourn for what he could not mend. *Abi in cellam, & dic, miserere mei*. (2.) He complains of the people, their obstinacy in sin, and the height of impiety they were got to; *the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant*, and that is the reason I have forsaken them; who can stay among them, to see every thing that is sacred, ruined, and run down? This the apostle calls his *making intercession against Israel*, Rom. xi. 2, 3. He had often been of choice their advocate, but now is necessitated to be their accuser before God. Thus *John v. 45. There is one that accuseth you, even Moses in whom ye trust*. Those are truly miserable, that have the testimony and prayers of God's prophets against them. (3.) He charges them, that they had forsaken God's covenant; though they retained circumcision the sign and seal of it, yet they had quitted his worship and service, which was the intention of it. Those who neglect God's ordinances, and let fall their communion with him, do really forsake his covenant, and break their league with him.—That they had *thrown down his altars*; not only deserted them, and suffered them to go to decay, but in their zeal for the worship of Baal, had wilfully demolished them: The private altars which the prophets of the Lord had, and which good people attended, who could not go up to Jerusalem, and would not worship the calves nor Baal, these separate altars, though breaking in upon the unity of the church, yet being erected and attended by those that sincerely aimed at the glory of God, and served him faithfully, the seeming schismaticness of them was dispensed with, God owned them for his altars, as well as that at Jerusalem, and the putting of them down is charged upon Israel as a crying sin. But this was not all, *They have slain thy prophets with the sword*, who, it is probable, ministered at those altars. Jezebel, a foreigner, did it, chap. xviii. 4. but it is charged upon the body of the people, because the generality of them were *consenting to their death*, and pleased with it. (4.) He gives the reason why he retired into this desert, and took up his residence in this cave. 1. It was, because, he could not appear to any purpose: *I only am left*, and have none to second or support me in any good design. They all said, *The Lord he is God*, but not one of them would stand by me, or offer to shelter me. That point then gained, was presently lost again, and Jezebel can do more to debauch them, than I can to reform them. What can one do against thousands?

sands? Despair of success hinders many a good enterprise. None is willing to venture alone, forgetting that those are not alone who have God with them. 2. It was, because, he could not appear with any safety; *They seek my life to take it away*, and I had better spend my life in a useless solitude, than lose my life in a fruitless endeavour to reform those that hate to be reformed.

4. God's manifestation of himself to him. Did he come hither to meet with God? he shall find that God will not fail to give him the meeting. Moses was put into the cave, when God's glory passed before him, but Elijah was called out of it, to *stand upon the mount before the Lord*, ver. 11. He saw no manner of similitude, no more than Israel did; when God talked to them in Horeb. But, 1. He heard a strong wind, and saw the terrible effects of it, for it rent the mountains, and tore the rocks. Thus was the trumpet sounded before the Judge of heaven and earth, by his angels, whom he makes spirits, or winds, *Psal.* civ. 4. sounded so loud, that the earth not only rang but rent again. 2. He felt the shock of an earthquake. 3. He saw an eruption of fire, ver. 12. These were to usher in the designed manifestation of the divine glory, angels being employed in them, whom he *maketh a flame of fire*, and who, as his ministers, march before him, to *prepare in this desert a high way for our God*. But, 4. At last he perceived a *still small voice*, in which the Lord was, i. e. by which he spoke to him, and not out of the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire: Those struck an awe upon him, awakened his attention, and obliged him to humility and reverence, but God chose to make known his mind to him in soft whispers, not in those dreadful sounds. Which when he perceived, (1.) He *wrapt his face in his mantle*, as one afraid to look upon the glory of God, and apprehensive that it would dazzle his eyes, and overcome him. The angels cover their faces before God, in token of reverence, *Isa.* vi. 2. Elijah hid his face, for shame, that he should be such a coward to out-run his duty, when he had such a God of power to stand by him in it.—The wind, and earthquake, and fire, did not make him cover his face, but the still voice did. Gracious souls are more affected by the tender mercies of the Lord, than by his terrors. (2.) He stood at the entrance of the cave, ready to hear what God had to say to him. This manner and method of God's manifesting himself here at mount Horeb, seems to refer to the discoveries God formerly made of himself at this place to Moses. 1. That there was a tempest, an earthquake, and fire, *Heb.* xii. 18. but when God would shew Moses his glory, he *proclaimed his goodness*; and so here, *He was the word*, was in the *still small voice*. 2. Then the law was thus given to Israel, with the appearances of terror first, and then with a voice of words; and Elijah being now called to revive that law, especially the two first commandments of it, is here taught how to manage it; he must not only awaken and terrify the people with amazing signs, like the earthquake and fire, but he must endeavour with a still small voice, to convince and persuade them, and not out-run them when he should do that.—Faith comes by hearing the word of God, miracles do but make way for it. 3. Then God spake to his people with terror; but in the gospel of Christ, which was to be introduced by the spirit and power of Elias, he would speak by a still small voice, the dread of which should not make us afraid, see *Heb.* xii. 18, &c.

5. The orders God gives him what to do. He repeated the question he had put to him before, *What dost thou here?* This is not a place for thee now. Elijah gives the same answer, ver. 14. complains of Israel's apostasy from God, and the ruin of religion among them. To this God gives him a reply. When he wished *he might die*, ver. 4. God answered him not according to his folly, but was so far from letting him die, that he not only kept him alive then, but provided that he should never die, but be translated. But when he complained of his discouragement, (and whither should God's prophets go with their complaints of that kind, but to their master) God gave him an answer. He sends him back with directions, to appoint Hazael king of Syria, ver. 15. Jehu king of Israel, and Elisha his successor in the eminency of the prophetic office, ver. 16. which is intended as a prediction, that by these God would chastise the degenerate Israelites, plead his own cause among them, and *avenge the quarrel of his covenant*, ver. 17. Elijah complained, that the wickedness of Israel was unpunished, the judgment of famine was too gentle, and had not reclaimed them; it was removed before they were reformed. *I have been jealous*, saith he, for God's name, but he himself has not appeared jealous for it. Well, saith God, be content, it is all in good time; *judgments are prepared for those scorers*, though they are not yet inflicted; the persons are pitched upon, and shall now be nominated, for they are now in being, who shall do the business. 1. When Hazael comes to be king of Syria, he shall make bloody work among the people, 2 *Kings* viii. 12. and so correct them for their idolatry. 2. When Jehu comes to be king of Israel, he shall make bloody work with the royal family, and shall utterly destroy the house of Ahab, that set up and maintained idolatry. 3. Elisha, while thou art on earth, shall strengthen thy hands; and when thou art gone, shall carry on thy work, and be a re-

maining witness against the apostasy of Israel, and even he shall slay the children of Bethel, that idolatrous city. Note, The wicked are reserved to judgment. *Evil pursues sinners*, and there is no escaping it; to attempt an escape, is but to run from one sword's point upon another. See *Jer.* xlviii. 44. *He that flees from the fear, shall fall into the pit; and he that gets up out of the pit, shall be taken in the snare*. Elisha, with the sword of the spirit shall terrify and wound the consciences of those who escape Hazael's sword of war, and Jehu's sword of justice; *With the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked*, *Isa.* xi. 4. 2 *Theff.* vi. 5. *Hos.* ii. 8.—It is a great comfort to good men, and good ministers, to think that God will never want instruments to do his work, in his time, but when they are gone, others shall be raised up to carry it on.

6. The comfortable information God gives him of the number of Israelites who retained their integrity, though he thought he was left alone, ver. 18. *I have left me seven thousand in Israel*, (besides Judah) *which have not bowed the knee to Baal*. Note, 1. In times of the greatest degeneracy and apostasy, God has always had, and will have, a remnant faithful to him; some that keep their integrity, and do not go down the stream. The apostle mentions this answer of God to Elijah, *Rom.* xi. 4. and applies it to his own day, when the Jews generally rejected the gospel, yet, saith he, *at this time also there is a remnant*, ver. 5. 2. It is God's work to preserve that remnant, and distinguish them from the rest, for without his grace, they could not have distinguished themselves. *I have left me*; it is therefore said to be a remnant, *according to the election of grace*. 3. It is but a little remnant; in comparison with the degenerate race; What is seven thousand to the thousands of Israel? Yet when those of every age come together, they will be found many more, *twelve thousand sealed out of each tribe*, *Rev.* vii. 4. 4. God's faithful ones are often his hidden ones, *Psal.* lxxxiii. 3. and the visible church scarce visible; the wheat lost in the chaff, and the gold in the dross, till the sifting, refining, separating day comes. 5. *The Lord knows them that are his*, though we do not; he sees in secret. 6. There are more good people in the world, than some wise and holy men think there are. Their jealousy of themselves, and for God, makes them think the corruption is universal; but God sees not as they do. When we come to heaven, as we shall miss a great many thence, whom we thought to have met there; so we shall meet a great many there, whom we little thought to have met there. God's love often proves larger than man's charity, and more extensive.

19. ¶ So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. 20. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again; for what have I done to thee? 21. And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen: and gave unto the people, and they did eat: then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.

Elisha was named last in the orders God gave to Elijah, but is first called, for by him the other two were to be called. He must come in Elijah's room; yet Elijah is forward to raise him, and is far from being jealous of his successor; but rejoiceth to think, that he shall leave the work of God in such good hands.

Concerning the call of Elisha, observe,

1. That it was a preventing surprizing call; Elijah found him by divine direction, or, perhaps, he was before acquainted with him, and knew where to find him: He found him not in the schools of the prophets, but *in the field*; not reading, or praying, or sacrificing, but *plowing*, ver. 19. Though a great man, as appears by his feast, ver. 21. master of the ground, and oxen, and servants, yet he did not think it any disparagement to him, to follow his business himself, and not only to inspect his servants, but himself to lay his hand to the plow. Idleness is no man's honour, nor is husbandry any man's disgrace. An honest calling in the world doth not at all put us out of the way of our heavenly calling; no more than it did Elisha, who was taken from following the plough, to feed Israel, and to sow the seed of the word; as the apostles from fishing, to catch men. Elisha enquired not after Elijah, but was prevented with this call. We love God, and choose him, because he chose us, and loved us first.

2. That it was a powerful call. Elijah did but cast his mantle upon him, ver. 19. in token of friendship, that he would take him under his care and tuition, as he did under his mantle; and to be one with him in the same clothes, or in token of his being clothed with the spirit of Elijah; now he put some of his honour

honour upon him, as Moses on Joshua, *Numb. xxvii. 20.* but when Elijah went to heaven, he had the mantle entire, *2 Kings ii. 13.* And immediately he left the oxen, to go as they would, and ran after Elijah, and assured him that he would follow him presently, *ver. 20.* An invisible hand touched his heart, and unaccountably inclined him by a secret power, without any external persuasions, to quit his husbandry, and give himself to the ministry. It is in a day of power, that Christ's subjects are made willing, *Psal. cx. 3.* nor would any come to Christ, unless they were thus drawn. Elisha came to a resolution presently, but begged a little time, not to ask leave, but only to take leave of his parents. This was not an excuse for delay, like his, *Luke ix. 61.* that desired he might bid them farewell that were at home; but only a reservation of the respect and duty he owed to his father and mother. Elijah bid him go back, and do that, he would not hinder him; nay, if he would, he might go back for good and all, for any thing he had done to him. He will not force him, nor take him against his will; let him sit down and count the cost, and make it his own act. The efficacy of God's grace, preserves the native liberty of man's will, so that they who are good, are good of choice, and not by constraint; nor pressed men, but volunteers.

3. That it was a pleasant and acceptable call to him, which appears by the farewell-feast he made for his family, *ver. 21.* Though he not only quitted all the comforts of his father's house, but exposed himself to the malignity of Jezebel, and her party, it was a discouraging time for prophets to set out in. A man that had consorted with flesh and blood, would not be fond of Elijah's mantle, nor willing to be in his coat; yet Elisha cheerfully, and with a great deal of satisfaction, leaves all to accompany him. Thus Matthew made a great fault, when he left the receipt of custom to follow Christ.

4. That it was an effectual call. Elijah did not stay for him, lest he should seem to compel him, but left him to his own choice, and he soon arose, went after him, and not only associated with him, but ministered to him, as his servant, *ver. 22.* *1 Kings iii. 11.* It is of great advantage to young ministers, to spend some time under the direction of those that are aged and experienced, whose years teach wisdom; and not to think much, if occasion be, to minister to them. Those that would be fit to teach, must have time to learn! And those that hope hereafter to rule and rule, must be willing at first to stoop and serve.

CHAP. XX.

This chapter is the history of a war between Ben-hadad king of Syria, and Ahab king of Israel, in which Ahab was slain and his kingdom divided: we shall mention of Elisha in all this story: it is observable, Ben-hadad's rage was kindled, and the persecution of the prophets began to end; which I have in general Elisha's properties, appears in all sorts, but being still, that many thousands of good people there were in Israel, more than he thought of, and his design, as we may suppose, in putting the Syrians to flight, and in raising up prophets in general parts of the country, as he was in the habit of doing, that they might be able to resist the nation, when the Syrians and Amos would be returned; while they were thus united. God preserved the nation with the assistance we have read of, which were the more remarkable. Ben-hadad's rage against Ben-hadad king of Syria, whose messenger Hamezi was slain in a charge in Israel; they made Ahab king of the Syrians, and yet now Ahab's rage against him, that is, against the king, who might be said to be a representative of the people of God.—*1 Kings ii. 11.* Ben-hadad's rage against Israel, and the Syrians, *ver. 1—11.* (1.) The Syrian king gave him, encouragement and strength by a promise, *ver. 13—15.* (2.) The Syrians calling again, and the second letter that gave them, *ver. 21—23.* (3.) The Syrians in general that made with Ben-hadad when he had him in his net, *ver. 31—34.* for which he is captured and threatened by a prophet, *ver. 35—43.*

1. **A**ND Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together, and there were thirty and two kings with him, and horses and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it. 2. And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel, into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Ben-hadad, 3. Thy silver and thy gold is mine, thy wives also and thy children, and all the goodliest, thy mine. 4. And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have. 5. And the messengers came again, and said, Thus saith Ben-hadad, saying, Although I have sent unto thee, saying, That thou deliver me thy silver and thy gold, and thy wives and thy children: 6. Yet I will send my servant unto thee, toorrow about this time, and they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy

servants; and it shall be, that whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put it in their hand, and take it away. 7. Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, Mark, I pray you, and see how this man seeketh mischief: for he sent unto me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold, and I denied him not. 8. And all the elders, and all the people said unto him, Hearken not unto him, nor consent. 9. Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Ben-hadad, Tell my lord the king, All that thou didst send for to thy servant at the first, I will do: but this thing I may not do. And the messengers departed, and brought him word again. 10. And Ben-hadad sent unto him, and said, The gods do so unto me and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me. 11. And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself, as he that putteth it off.

Here is, 1. The threatening descent which Ben-hadad made upon Ahab's kingdom, and the siege he laid to Samaria, his royal city, *ver. 1.* what the ground of the quarrel was, we are not told, covetousness and ambition was the principle, which would never want some pretence or other; David, in his time, had quite subdued the Syrians, and made them tributaries to Israel, but Israel's apostasy from God makes them formidable again; Ahab had tempted the Syrians to invade Israel once, *chap. xv. 18, 19, 20.* and now they did it of their own accord: it is dangerous bringing in a foreign force into a country, posterity may pay dear for it.—Ben-hadad had with him thirty two kings, who were either tributaries to him, and bound in duty to attend him, or confederates with him, and bound in interest to assist him; how little did the title of king look, when all these poor petty governors pretended to it.

2. The treaty between these two kings; surely Israel's defence was departed from them, or else the Syrians could not have marched so readily, and with so little opposition to Samaria, the head and heart of the country, a city lately built, and therefore, we may suppose, not well fortified, but like to fall quickly into the hands of the invaders; both sides are aware of this, and therefore,

(1.) Ben-hadad's proud spirit sends Ahab a very insolent demand, *ver. 2, 3.* A parley is founded, and a trumpeter (we may suppose) is sent into the city to let Ahab know, that upon these terms he will raise the siege: That Ahab become his vassal, nay, his villain, and not only pay him a tribute out of what he has, but make over his title to Ben-hadad, and hold all at his will, even his wives and children, the goodliest of them; the manner of expression is designed to gall them; all shall be mine without exception.

(2.) Ahab's poor spirit sends Ben-hadad a very shocking submission: it is general indeed, he cannot mention particulars in his surrender, with so much pleasure, as Ben-hadad did in his demand, but it is effectual, *I am thine, and all that I have.* *ver. 4.* see the effect of *sin. 1.* If he had not by sin provoked God to depart from him, Ben-hadad could not have made such a demand; sin brings men into such straits, by putting them out of divine protection; if God shall not rule us, our enemies shall; a rebel to God, is slave to all beside.—Ahab had prepared his silver and gold for Baal, *chap. ii. 23.* surely therefore is it taken from him; such an alienation amounts to a forfeiture. 2. If he had not by sin wronged his own conscience, and set that against him, he could not have made such a mean surrender; guilt debilitates men, and makes them cowards; he knew Baal could not help, and had no reason to think that God would, and therefore is content to buy his life upon any terms; skin for skin, and all that is dear to him, he will give for it, he will rather live a beggar, than die a prince.

3. Ben-hadad's proud spirit rises upon his submission, and becomes yet more insolent and imperious, *ver. 5, 6.* Ahab had laid his all at his feet, at his mercy, expecting that one king would use another generously, that this acknowledgment of Ben-hadad's sovereignty would have contented him, the honour was sufficient for the present, and he might hereafter make use of it if he saw cause, *and yet prophesied Lame;* but this will not serve, 1. Ben-hadad is as covetous as he is proud, and cannot go away, unless he have the possession as well as the dominion; he thinks it not enough to call it his, unless he have it in his hands, he will not so much as lend Ahab the use of his own goods more a day longer. 2. He is as spiteful, as he is haughty; had he come himself to pick out what he had a mind of, he had been some respect to a crowned head, but he will send his servants to insult the prince, and tread over him, to ride the palace, and strip it of all its ornaments; nay, to give Ahab the more vexation, they shall be ordered not only to take what they please, but if they can but learn which are the persons or things that Ahab is in a particular manner fond of, to take those, *whayja-*

ever is pleasant in thine eyes they shall take that away; we are oft crossed in that which we most dote upon, and that proves least safe which is most dear.—(3.) He is as unreasonable as he is unjust, and will construe the surrender Ahab made for himself as made for all his subjects too, and will have them also to lie at his mercy, they shall search not only thy house, but *the houses of thy servants* too, and plunder them at discretion; blessed be God for peace and property, and that what we have we can call our own.

4. Ahab's poor spirit begins to rise too upon his growing insolence, and if it become not bold, yet it becomes desperate, and he will rather hazard his life than give up all thus.—(1.) Now he takes advice of his privy council, who encourage him to stand it out.—He speaks but poorly, *ver. 7.* appeals to them whether Ben-hadad were not an unreasonable enemy, and did not seek mischief; and what other could he expect from one that without any provocation given him, had invaded his country, and besieged his capital city? He owns to them how he had truckled to him before, and would have them advise him what he should do in this strait; they speak bravely, *ver. 8.* *Hearken not to him, nor consent*, promising, no doubt, to stand by him in the refusal.—(2.) Yet he expresseth himself very modestly in his denial, *ver. 9* he owns Ben-hadad's dominion over him, *Tell my lord the king*, I have no design to affront him, nor to recede from the surrender I have already made, what I offered at first I will stand to, *but this thing I may not do*, I must not give what is none of my own; it was a mortification to Ben-hadad that even such an abject spirit as Ahab's was, dares deny him, which yet it should seem by his manner of expressing himself, he durst not have done if his people had not animated him.

5. Ben-hadad proudly swears the ruin of Samaria, the threatening waves of his wrath meeting with this check, rage and foam, and make a noise, he huffs and hectors, and imprecates the impotent revenges of his gods, *if the dust of Samaria serve for handfuls for his army*, *ver. 10.* so numerous so resolute an army will he bring into the field against Samaria, and so confident is he of their success, it will be done as easily as the taking up a handful of dust; all shall be carried away, even the ground on which the city stands; thus confident is his pride, thus cruel is his malice; this prepares him to be ruined, though such a prince and such a people are unworthy of the satisfaction of seeing him ruined.

6. Ahab sends him a decent rebuke to his assurance, dares not defy his menaces, only minds him of the uncertain turns of war, *ver. 11.* Let not him that begins a war, and is girding on his sword, his armour, his harness, boast of victory, or think himself sure of it, *as if he had put it off*, and were come home a conqueror; this was one of the wisest words that ever Ahab spoke, and is a good item or memento to us all; it is folly to boast before of any day, since we know not what it may bring forth, *Prov. xxvii. 1.* but especially to boast of a day of battle, which may prove as much against us as we promise our selves it will be for us; it is impolitic to despise an enemy, and to be too sure of victory is the way to be beaten; apply it to our spiritual conflicts, Peter fell by his confidence; while we are here we are but girding on the harness, and therefore must never boast as though we had put it off; *happy is the man that feareth always*, and is never off his watch.

12. And it came to pass, when Ben-hadad heard this message (as he was drinking, he and the kings in the pavilions) that he said unto his servants, *Set your selves in array*: And they set themselves in array against the city.

13. ¶ And behold there came a prophet unto Ahab king of Israel, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day, and thou shalt know that I am the LORD. 14. And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith the LORD, *Even* by the young men of the princes of the provinces. Then he said, Who shall order the battle? And he answered, Thou. 15. Then he numbred the young men of the princes of the provinces, and they were two hundred and thirty two: and after them he numbred all the people, *even* all the children of Israel, *being* seven thousand. 16. And they went out at noon: but Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him. 17. And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first, and Ben-hadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria. 18. And he said, Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive. 19. So these young men of the princes of the provinces came out of the city, and the army which followed them. 20. And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them: and Ben-hadad the king of Syria c-

scaped on an horse, with the horsemen. 21. And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter.

The treaty between the besiegers and the besieged being broken off abruptly, we have here an account of the battle that ensued immediately.

1. The Syrians, the besiegers, had their directions from a drunken king, who gave orders over his cups, as he was drinking, *ver. 12.* *drinking himself drunk*, *ver. 16.* *with the kings in the pavilions*, and this at noon; drunkenness is a sin that armies and their officers have of old been addicted to; say not thou then that the former days were in this respect better than these, though these are bad enough; had he not been very secure he would not have set to drink, and had he not been intoxicated, he would not have been so very secure; security and sensuality went together in the old world and Sodom, *Luke xvii. 26*, &c. Ben-hadad's drunkenness was the forerunner of his fall, as Belshazzar's was, *Dan. v.*—How could he prosper that preferred his pleasure before his business, and kept his kings to drink with him when they should have been at their respective posts to fight for him? In his drink, (1.) He orders the town to be invested, the engines fixed, and every thing got ready for the making of a general attack, *ver. 12.* but stirs not from his drunken club to see it done; *Wo unto thee, O land, when thy king is such a child.* (2.) When the besiegers made a salley, (and by that time he was far gone) he gave orders to take them alive, *ver. 18.* not to kill them, which might have been done more easily and safely, but to seize them; which gave them an opportunity of killing the aggressors; so imprudent was he in the orders he gave, as well as unjust, in ordering them to be taken prisoners, though they came for peace, and to renew the treaty; thus, as is usual, he drinks and forgets the law, both the policies and the justice of war.

2. The Israelites, the besieged, had their directions from an inspired prophet, one of the prophets of the Lord, whom Ahab had hated and persecuted: *And behold a prophet, even one, drew near to the king of Israel*, so it may be read, *ver. 13.* Behold and wonder, that God should send a prophet with a kind and gracious message to so wicked a prince as Ahab was; but he did it, (1.) For his people Israel's sake, who, though wickedly degenerated, were the seed of Abraham his friend, and Jacob his chosen, the children of the covenant, and not yet cast off. (2.) That he might magnify his mercy in doing good to one so evil and unthankful, might either bring him to repentance or leave him the more inexcusable. (3.) That he might mortify the pride of Ben-hadad, and check his insolence; Ahab's idolatry shall be punished hereafter, but Ben-hadad's haughtiness shall be chastised now, for God resists the proud, and is pleased to say that *he fears the wrath of the enemy*, *Deut. xxxii. 26, 27.* There was but one prophet perhaps to be had in Samaria, and he drew near with this message, intimating that he had been forced to keep at a distance; Ahab in his prosperity would not have born the sight of him, but now he bids him welcome, when none of the prophets of the groves could give him any assistance; he enquired not for a prophet of the Lord, but God sent one to him unasked, for he waits to be gracious.

Now, (1.) This prophet animates him with an assurance of victory, which was more than all the elders of Israel could give him, *ver. 8.* though they promised to stand by him; this prophet, who is not named, for he *spoke in God's name*, tells him from God, that this very day the siege should be raised, and the army of the Syrians routed, *ver. 13.* When the prophet said, *Thus saith the Lord*, we may suppose Ahab began to tremble, expecting a message of wrath, but is revived when it proves a gracious one; it is intimated to him what good use he must make of this blessed turn of affairs. *Thou shalt know that I am Jehovah*, the sovereign Lord of all; God's foretelling a thing so very unlikely, proved that it was his own doing.—(2.) He instructs him what to do for the gaining of this victory. (1.) He must not stay till the enemy attacked him, but must salley out upon them, and surprise them in their trenches. (2.) The persons employed must be the *young men of the princes of the provinces*, the pages, the footmen, who were few in number, but two hundred and thirty two, utterly unacquainted with war, and the unlikeliest men that could be thought of for such a bold attempt, yet these must do it, those weak and foolish things must be instruments of confounding the wise and strong, that while Ben-hadad's boasting is punished, Ahab's may be prevented and precluded, and the *excellency of the power might be of God*.—(3.) Ahab must himself so far testify his confidence in the word of God as to command in person, though in the eye of reason he exposed himself to the utmost danger by it; but it is fit those who have the benefit of God's promises should venture upon them. Yet, (4.) He is allowed to make use of what other forces he had at hand, to follow the blow when these young men had broke the ice; all he had in Samaria, or within call, were but seven thousand men, *ver. 15.* it is observable that it is the same number with theirs that had not bowed the knee to Baal, chap. xix. 18. though it is likely not the same men.

honour upon him, as Moses on Joshua, *Numb. xxvii. 20.* but when Elijah went to heaven, he had the mantle entire, *2 Kings ii. 13.* And immediately he *left the oxen*, to go as they would, and *ran after Elijah*, and assured him that he would follow him presently, *ver. 20.* An invisible hand touched his heart, and unaccountably inclined him by a secret power, without any external persuasions, to quit his husbandry, and give himself to the ministry. It is in a day of power, that Christ's subjects are made willing, *Psal. cx. 3.* nor would any come to Christ, unless they were thus drawn. Elisha came to a resolution presently, but begged a little time, not to ask leave, but only to take leave of his parents. This was not an excuse for delay, like his, *Luke ix. 61.* that desired he might *bid them farewell that were at home*; but only a reservation of the respect and duty he owed to his father and mother. Elijah bid him go back, and do that, he would not hinder him; nay, if he would, he might go back for good and all, for any thing he had done to him. He will not force him, nor take him against his will; let him sit down and count the cost, and make it his own act. The efficacy of God's grace, preserves the native liberty of man's will, so that they who are good, are good of choice, and not by constraint; nor pressed men, but volunteers.

3. That it was a pleasant and acceptable call to him, which appears by the farewell-feast he made for his family, *ver. 21.* Though he not only quitted all the comforts of his father's house, but exposed himself to the malignity of Jezebel, and her party, it was a discouraging time for prophets to set out in. A man that had consulted with flesh and blood, would not be fond of Elijah's mantle, nor willing to be in his coat; yet Elisha cheerfully, and with a great deal of satisfaction, leaves all to accompany him. Thus Matthew made a great feast, when he left the receipt of custom to follow Christ.

4. That it was an effectual call. Elijah did not stay for him, lest he should seem to compel him, but left him to his own choice, and he soon arose, went after him, and not only associated with him, but *ministered to him*, as his servitor, *poured water on his hands*, *2 Kings iii. 11.* It is of great advantage to young ministers, to spend some time under the direction of those that are aged and experienced, whose years teach wisdom; and not to think much, if occasion be, to minister to them. Those that would be fit to teach, must have time to learn! And those that hope hereafter to rise and rule, must be willing at first to stoop and serve.

C H A P. XX.

*This chapter is the history of a war between Ben-hadad king of Syria, and Ahab king of Israel, in which Ahab was once and again victorious; we read nothing of Elijah or Elisha in all this story; it is probable, Jezebel's rage was abated, and the persecution of the prophets began to cool; which gleam of peace Elijah improves, appears not at court, but being told, how many thousands of good people there were in Israel, more than he thought of, employs himself, as we may suppose, in founding religious houses, schools, or colleges of prophets in several parts of the country, to be nurseries of religion, that they might help to reform the nation, when the throne and court would not be reformed; while they were thus busied, God favoured the nation with the successes we here read of, which were the more remarkable, because obtained against Ben-hadad king of Syria, whose successor Hazael was ordained to be a scourge to Israel; they must shortly suffer by the Syrians, and yet now triumph over them, that, if possible, they might be led to repentance by the goodness of God.—Here is, (1.) Ben-hadad's descent upon Israel, and his insolent demand, *ver. 1—12.* (2.) The defeat Ahab gave him, encouraged and directed by a prophet, *ver. 13—21.* (3.) The Syrians rallying again, and the second defeat Ahab gave them, *ver. 22—30.* (4.) The covenant of peace Ahab made with Ben-hadad when he had him at his mercy, *ver. 31—34.* for which he is reproved and threatened by a prophet, *ver. 35—43.**

1. **A**ND Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together, and *there were thirty and two kings with him*, and horses and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it. 2. And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel, into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Ben-hadad, 3. Thy silver and thy gold is mine, thy wives also and thy children, *even the goodliest, are mine.* 4. And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, *I am thine*, and all that I have. 5. And the messengers came again, and said, Thus speaketh Ben-hadad, saying, Although I have sent unto thee, saying, Thou shalt deliver me thy silver and thy gold, and thy wives and thy children: 6. Yet I will send my servant unto thee, to morrow about this time, and they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy

servants; and it shall be, *that* whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put *it* in their hand, and take *it* away. 7. Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, Mark, I pray you, and see how this *man* seeketh mischief: for he sent unto me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold, and I denied him not. 8. And all the elders, and all the people said unto him, Harken not *unto him*, nor consent. 9. Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Ben-hadad, Tell my lord the king, All that thou didst send for to thy servant at the first, I will do: but this thing I may not do. And the messengers departed, and brought him word again. 10. And Ben-hadad sent unto him, and said, The gods do so unto me and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me. 11. And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell *him*, Let not him that girdeth on *his harness* boast himself, as he that putteth it off.

Here is, 1. The threatening descent which Ben-hadad made upon Ahab's kingdom, and the siege he laid to Samaria, his royal city, *ver. 1.* what the ground of the quarrel was, we are not told, covetousness and ambition was the principle, which would never want some pretence or other; David, in his time, had quite subdued the Syrians, and made them tributaries to Israel, but Israel's apostasy from God makes them formidable again; Aha had tempted the Syrians to invade Israel once, *chap. xv. 18, 19, 20.* and now they did it of their own accord; it is dangerous bringing in a foreign force into a country, posterity may pay dear for it.—Ben-hadad had with him thirty two kings, who were either tributaries to him, and bound in duty to attend him, or confederates with him, and bound in interest to assist him; how little did the title of king look, when all these poor petty governors pretended to it.

2. The treaty between these two kings; surely Israel's defence was departed from them, or else the Syrians could not have marched so readily, and with so little opposition to Samaria, the head and heart of the country, a city lately built, and therefore, we may suppose, not well fortified, but like to fall quickly into the hands of the invaders; both sides are aware of this, and therefore,

(1.) Ben-hadad's proud spirit sends Ahab a very insolent demand, *ver. 2, 3.* A parley is founded, and a trumpeter (we may suppose) is sent into the city to let Ahab know, that upon these terms he will raise the siege; That Ahab become his vassal, nay, his villain, and not only pay him a tribute out of what he has, but make over his title to Ben-hadad, and hold all at his will, even his wives and children, the goodliest of them; the manner of expression is designed to gall them; all shall be mine without exception.

(2.) Ahab's poor spirit sends Ben-hadad a very sneaking submission; it is general indeed, he cannot mention particulars in his surrender, with so much pleasure, as Ben-hadad did in his demand, but it is effectual, *I am thine, and all that I have*, *ver. 4.* see the effect of sin. 1. If he had not by sin provoked God to depart from him, Ben-hadad could not have made such a demand; sin brings men into such straits, by putting them out of divine protection; if God shall not rule us, our enemies shall; a rebel to God, is slave to all beside.—Ahab had prepared his silver and gold for Baal, *Hos. ii. 8.* justly therefore is it taken from him; such an alienation amounts to a forfeiture. 2. If he had not by sin wronged his own conscience, and set that against him, he could not have made such a mean surrender; guilt dispirits men, and makes them cowards; he knew Baal could not help, and had no reason to think that God would, and therefore is content to buy his life upon any terms; skin for skin, and all that is dear to him, he will give for it, he will rather live a beggar, than die a prince.

3. Ben-hadad's proud spirit rises upon his submission, and becomes yet more insolent and imperious, *ver. 5, 6.* Ahab had laid his all at his feet, at his mercy, expecting that one king would use another generously, that this acknowledgment of Ben-hadad's sovereignty would have contented him, the honour was sufficient for the present, and he might hereafter make use of it if he saw cause, *satis est prostrasse Leonem*; but this will not serve, 1. Ben-hadad is as covetous as he is proud, and cannot go away, unless he have the possession as well as the dominion; he thinks it not enough to call it his, unless he have it in his hands, he will not so much as lend Ahab the use of his own goods above a day longer. 2. He is as spiteful, as he is haughty; had he come himself to pick out what he had a mind of; it had been some respect to a crowned head, but he will send his servants to insult the prince, and hector over him, to rattle the palace, and strip it of all its ornaments; nay, to give Ahab the more vexation, they shall be ordered not only to take what they please, but if they can but learn which are the persons or things that Ahab is in a particular manner fond of, to take those, *whatsoever*

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scaped on an horse, with the horsemen. 21. And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter.

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2. The Israelites, the besieged, had their directions from an inspired prophet, one of the prophets of the Lord, whom Ahab had hated and persecuted: *And behold a prophet, even one, drew near to the king of Israel*, so it may be read, *ver. 13.* Behold and wonder, that God should send a prophet with a kind and gracious message to so wicked a prince as Ahab was; but he did it, (1.) For his people Israel's sake, who, though wickedly degenerated, were the seed of Abraham his friend, and Jacob his chosen, the children of the covenant, and not yet cast off. (2.) That he might magnify his mercy in doing good to one so evil and unthankful, might either bring him to repentance or leave him the more inexcusable. (3.) That he might mortify the pride of Ben-hadad, and check his insolence; Ahab's idolatry shall be punished hereafter, but Ben-hadad's haughtiness shall be chastised now, for God resists the proud, and is pleased to say that *he fears the wrath of the enemy*, *Deut. xxxii. 26, 27.* There was but one prophet perhaps to be had in Samaria, and he drew near with this message, intimating that he had been forced to keep at a distance; Ahab in his prosperity would not have born the sight of him, but now he bids him welcome, when none of the prophets of the groves could give him any assistance; he enquired not for a prophet of the Lord, but God sent one to him unasked, for he waits to be gracious.

Now, (1.) This prophet animates him with an assurance of victory, which was more than all the elders of Israel could give him, *ver. 8.* though they promised to stand by him; this prophet, who is not named, for he *spoke in God's name*, tells him from God, that this very day the siege should be raised, and the army of the Syrians routed, *ver. 13.* When the prophet said, *Thus saith the Lord*, we may suppose Ahab began to tremble, expecting a message of wrath, but is revived when it proves a gracious one; it is intimated to him what good use he must make of this blessed turn of affairs. *Thou shalt know that I am Jehovah*, the sovereign Lord of all; God's foretelling a thing so very unlikely, proved that it was his own doing.—(2.) He instructs him what to do for the gaining of this victory. (1.) He must not stay till the enemy attacked him, but must salley out upon them, and surprise them in their trenches. (2.) The persons employed must be the *young men of the princes of the provinces*, the pages, the footmen, who were few in number, but two hundred and thirty two, utterly unacquainted with war, and the unlikeliest men that could be thought of for such a bold attempt, yet these must do it, those weak and foolish things must be instruments of confounding the wise and strong, that while Ben-hadad's boasting is punished, Ahab's may be prevented and precluded, and the *excellency of the power might be of God*.—(3.) Ahab must himself so far testify his confidence in the word of God as to command in person, though in the eye of reason he exposed himself to the utmost danger by it; but it is fit those who have the benefit of God's promises should venture upon them. Yet, (4.) He is allowed to make use of what other forces he had at hand, to follow the blow when these young men had broke the ice; all he had in Samaria, or within call, were but seven thousand men, *ver. 15.* it is observable that it is the same number with theirs that had not *bowed the knee to Baal*, chap. xix. 13. though it is likely not the same men.

3. The issue was accordingly, the proud Syrians were beaten, and the poor despised Israelites were more than conquerors; the young men gave an alarm to the Syrians just at noon, at high dinner time, supported by what little force they had, *ver.* 15. Ben-hadad despised them at first, *ver.* 18. but when they had, with unparalleled bravery and dexterity, *slain every one his man*, and so put the army into disorder, that proud man durst not face them, but mounted immediately, drunk as he was, and made the best of his way, *ver.* 20. See how God *slips off the spirit of princes*, and makes himself *terrible to the kings of the earth*: Now where is the silver and gold he demanded of Ahab? Where the handfuls of Samaria's dust? Those that are most secure, are commonly least courageous.—Ahab failed not to improve this advantage, but *slew the Syrians with a great slaughter*, *ver.* 21. Note, God oftentimes makes one wicked man a scourge to another.

22. ¶ And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go strengthen thy self, and mark and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee. 23. And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods *are* gods of the hills, therefore they were stronger than we: but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. 24. And do this thing, Take the kings away, every man out of his place, and put captains in their rooms. 25. And number thee an army like the army that thou hast lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, *and* surely we shall be stronger than they. And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so. 26. And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Ben-hadad numbred the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel. 27. And the children of Israel were numbred, and were all present, and went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them, like two little flocks of kids; but the Syrians filled the country. 28. ¶ And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD *is* God of the hills, but he *is* not God of the valleys: therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, *and* ye shall know that I am the LORD. 29. And they pitched one over against the other seven days; and so it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined: and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day. 30. But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and *there* a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men *that were* left: and Ben-hadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber.

We have here an account of another successful campaign which Ahab, by divine aid, made against the Syrians, in which he gave them a greater defeat than in the former; strange! Ahab idolatrous, and yet victorious; a persecutor, and yet a conqueror; God has wise and holy ends, in suffering wicked men to prosper, and in it glorifies his own name.

1. Ahab is admonished by a prophet to prepare for another war, *ver.* 22. It should seem he was now secure, and looked but a little way before him; those that are careless of their souls, are often as careless of their outward affairs; but the prophet (to whom God made known the following counsels of the Syrians) told him, they would renew their attempt at the return of the year, in hope to retrieve the honour they had lost, and be revenged for the blow they had received.—And therefore bid him strengthen himself, put himself into a posture of defence, and be ready to give them a warm reception.—God had decreed the end, but Ahab must use the means, else he tempts God; help thy self, strengthen thy self, and God will help and strengthen thee.—The enemies of God's Israel are restless in their malice, and though they may take some breathing time for themselves, yet are still *breathing out threatnings and slaughter* against the church: It concerns us always to expect assaults from our spiritual enemies, and therefore to mark and see what we do.

2. Ben-hadad is advised by those about him concerning the operations of the next campaign.

(1.) They advised him to *change his ground*, *ver.* 23. They take it for granted it was not Israel, but Israel's gods that beat them, so great a regard was then universally had to invisible powers; but they speak very ignorantly of Jehovah; that he was many, whereas he is one, and his name one; that he was their God only, a local deity, peculiar to that nation, whereas he is the Creator and Ruler of all the world; and that he was a God of the hills only, because David their great prophet had

said, *I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help*, Psa. cxxi. 1. and that *his foundation was in the holy mountain*, Psa. lxxxvii. 1. lxxviii. 54. and there was great talk of his *holy hill*, Psa. xv. 1. xxiv. 3. supposing him altogether such a one as their imaginary deities; they fancied he was confined to his hills, and could not, or would not come down from them, and therefore an army in the valley would be below his cognizance, and from under his protection; thus vain were the *Gentiles in their imaginations* concerning God, so wretchedly were *their foolish hearts darkened*, and *professing themselves to be wise they became fools*. (2.) They advise him to change his officers, *ver.* 24, 25. not to employ the kings, who were commanders by birth, but captains rather, who were commanders by merit, who were enured to war, would not affect to make a shew like the kings, but would go through with business; let every man be employed in that which he is brought up to, and used to, and preferred to that which he is fit for.—Syria, it seems, was rich and populous, when it could furnish recruits sufficient after so great a defeat, *horse for horse, chariot for chariot*.

3. Both armies take the field; Ben-hadad with his Syrians encamp near Aphek, in the tribe of Asher, a city, it is likely, in his own possession, one of those which his father had won, *ver.* 34. and the country about flat and level, and fit for his purpose, *ver.* 26. Ahab with his forces, posted himself at some distance over against them, *ver.* 27. but the disproportion of numbers was very remarkable, *ver.* 27. *the children of Israel*, who were cantoned into two battalions, looked like *two little flocks of kids*, their numbers small, their equipage mean, and a very sorry figure they made; *but the Syrians filled the country* with their numbers and with their noise, their chariots and carriages, their bag and baggage.

4. Ahab is encouraged to fight the Syrians, notwithstanding their advantages and confidence.—A man of God is sent to him, to tell him, that this numerous army should *all be delivered into his hand*, *ver.* 28. but not for his sake; be it known to him, he was utterly unworthy for whom God should do this, not because he had praised God, nor prayed to him, we do not read that he did either; but because the Syrians had blasphemed God, and had said, He is *the God of the hills, and not of the valleys*; therefore God will do it in his own vindication, and to preserve the honour of his own name; if the Syrians had said, Ahab and his people have forsaken their God, and so put themselves out of his protection, and therefore we may venture to attack them, it is likely, God would have delivered Israel into their hands; but when they go upon a presumption so very injurious to the divine omnipotence, and the honour of him who is Lord of all hosts, not only in hills and valleys, but in heaven and earth, which they are willingly ignorant of, they shall be undeceived at the expence of that vast army, which is so much their pride and confidence.

5. After the armies had faced one another seven days, (the Syrians, it is likely, boasting, and the Israelites trembling) they engaged, and the Syrians were totally routed, an hundred thousand men slain by the sword of Israel, in the field of battle, *ver.* 29. and twenty seven thousand men, that thought themselves safe *under the walls of Aphek*, a fortified city, (from the walls of which, the shooters might annoy the enemy if they pursued them, 2 Sam. xi. 24.) found their bane where they hoped for protection, the wall fell upon them; probably overthrown by an earthquake, and the cities of Canaan being walled up to heaven, it reached a great way, and they were all either killed or hurt, or ill frightened.—Ben-hadad, who thought his city Aphek should have held out against the conquerors, finding it thus unvalled, and the remnant of his forces dispirited and dispersed, he had nothing but secrecy to rely upon for safety, and therefore hid himself in *a chamber within a chamber*, lest the pursuers should seize him; see how the greatest confidence often ends in the greatest cowardise; now is the God of Israel the *God of the valleys*, or no? He shall know, now he is forced *into an inner chamber to bide himself*, see chap. xxii. 25.

31. ¶ And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel *are* merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; peradventure he will save thy life. 32. So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and *put* ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Ben-hadad saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, *Is* he yet alive? he *is* my brother. 33. Now the men did diligently observe whether *any thing would come* from him, and did hastily catch it: and they said, Thy brother Ben-hadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Ben-hadad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot. 34. And Ben-hadad said unto him, The cities which my father took from thy father, I will restore, and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria.

maria. Then said Ahab, I will fend thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away. 35. ¶ And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of the LORD, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him. 36. Then said he unto him, Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee. And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and slew him. 37. Then he found another man, and said, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man smote him, so that in smiting he wounded him. 38. So the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with ashes upon his face. 39. And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle, and behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. 40. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be, thy self hast decided it. 41. And he hastened, and took the ashes away from his face, and the king of Israel discerned him that he was of the prophets. 42. And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand, a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people. 43. And the king of Israel went to his house, heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria.

Here is an account of what followed upon the victory which Israel obtained over the Syrians.

1. Ben-hadad's tame and mean submission; even in his inner chamber he fears, and would if he could flee further, though none pursues; his servants seeing him and themselves reduced to the last extremity, advise that they surrender at discretion, and make themselves prisoners and petitioners to Ahab for their lives, *ver. 31*. The servants will put their lives in their hands and venture first, and their master shall act according as they speed.—Their inducement to take this course, is the great reputation the kings of Israel had for clemency above any of their neighbours; we have heard that they are merciful kings, not oppressive to their subjects that are under their power (as governments then went, that of Israel was one of the most easy and gentle) and therefore not cruel to their enemies, when they lay at their mercy; perhaps, they had this notion of the kings of Israel, because they had heard that the God of Israel proclaimed his name *gracious and merciful*, and they concluded their kings would make their God their pattern; it was an honour to the kings of Israel to be thus represented, as, indeed, every Israelite is then dressed as becomes him, when he *puts on bowels of mercies*. They are merciful kings, therefore we may hope to find mercy upon our submission; this encouragement poor sinners have to repent and humble themselves before God; have we not heard, that the God of Israel is a merciful God? Have we not found him so? Let us therefore rent our hearts and return to him, *Joel ii. 13*. That is evangelical repentance, which flows from an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, *there is forgiveness with him*.

Two things they undertake to represent to Ahab;

(1.) Their master a penitent; for they *girded sackcloth on their loins*, as mourners, and *put ropes on their heads*, as condemned criminals going to execution, taking on them to be sorry that they had invaded his country, and disturbed his repose, and to own that they deserved to be hanged for it; here they are ready to do penance for it, and throw themselves at the feet of him whom they had injured; many take on them to repent of their wrong doing, when it doth not succeed, who, if they had prospered in it, would have justified it, and gloried in it.

(2.) Their master a beggar, a beggar for his life; *Thy servant Ben-hadad saith, I pray thee let me live*, *ver. 32*. Though I live a perpetual exile from my own country, and captive in this, yet upon any terms, *let me live*. What a great change is here, 1. In his condition, how is he fallen from the height of power and prosperity, to the depths of disgrace and distress, and all the miseries of poverty and slavery; see the uncertainty of human affairs, such turns are they subject to, that the spoke which was uppermost, may soon come to be undermost. 2. In his temper; in the beginning of the chapter huffing and hectoring, swearing and threatening, and none more high in his demands, but here sneaking and whining, and none more low in his requests; how poorly doth he beg his life at the hand of him, whom he had there been trampling upon! The most haughty in prosperity, are commonly most abject in adversity, but an evil spirit will be so in both conditions; see how God glorifies himself, when he

looks upon proud men, and abaseth them, and hides them in the dust together, *Job xl. 12*.

2. Ahab's foolish acceptance of his submission, and the league he suddenly clapt up with him upon it; he was proud to be thus courted by him whom he had feared, enquires for him with great tenderness, *Is he yet alive? He is my brother*, brother king, though not brother Israelite; and Ahab valued himself more by his royalty, than by his religion, and others accordingly.—*Is he thy brother?* Ahab, Did he use thee like a brother, when he sent thee that barbarous message? *ver. 5, 6*. Would he have called thee brother if he had been the conqueror? Would he now have called himself thy servant, if he had not been reduced to the utmost strait? Canst thou suffer thy self to be thus imposed upon by a forced and counterfeit submission? This word brother they caught at, *ver. 33*. and were encouraged by that to go and fetch him to the king, he that calls him brother will *let him live*; let poor penitents hear God in his word, calling them children, *Jer. xxxi. 20*. catch at it, echo to it, and call him Father.—Ben-hadad, upon his submission, shall not only be coached, he *took him up into the chariot*, but treated with, as an ally, *ver. 34*. he made a covenant with him, not consulting either God's prophets, or the elders of the land, or himself, considering what was fit to be insisted on, but, as if Ben-hadad had been conqueror, he shall make his own terms; he might now have demanded some of Ben-hadad's cities, when all of them lay at the mercy of his victorious army, but is content with the restitution of his own; he might now have demanded the stores and treasures, and magazines of Damascus, to augment the wealth and strength of his own kingdom, but is content with a poor liberty at his own expence to build streets there, a point of honour and no advantage, or no more than what the kings of Syria had had in Samaria, though they never had had so much power as he had now to support the demand of it.—With this covenant he sent him away, without so much as reproving him for his blasphemous reflections upon the God of Israel, whose honour Ahab had no concern for. Note, There are those on whom success is ill bestowed, they know not how to serve either God or their generation, or even their own true interests with their prosperity; *let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness*.

3. The reproof given to Ahab for his clemency to Ben-hadad, and his covenant with him; it was given him by a prophet in the name of the Lord; the Jews say, it was Micajah, and not unlikely, for Ahab complains of him, *chap. xxii. 8*. that he used to *prophecy evil concerning him*; this prophet designed to reprove Ahab by a parable, that he might oblige him to condemn himself, as Nathan and the woman of Tekoa did David; to make his parable the more plausible he finds it necessary to put himself into the posture of a wounded soldier.

(1.) With much ado he gets himself wounded, for he would not do it with his own hands; he commanded one of his brother prophets, his neighbour or companion, (for so the word signifies) to smite him, and this in God's name, *ver. 35*. but finds him not so willing to give the blow, as he is to receive it, he refused to smite him, others were forward enough to smite prophets, they need not smite one another; we cannot but think it was from a good principle that he declined it, if it must be done, let another do it, not I, I cannot find in my heart to strike my friend; good men can much easier receive a wrongful blow than give one, yet because he disobeyed an express command of God, (which was so much the worse if he were himself a prophet) like that other disobedient prophet, *chap. xiii. 24*. he was presently *slain by a lion*, *ver. 36*. This was intended not only to shew in general, how provoking disobedience is, *Col. iii. 6*. but to intimate to Ahab, who, no doubt, was told the story, that if a good prophet were thus punished for sparing his friend and God's, when God said *smite*, of how much sorer punishment should a wicked king be thought worthy, who spared his enemy and God's, when God said *smite*? *Shall mortal man pretend to be more just than God, more pure or more compassionate than his Maker?* We must be merciful as he is merciful, and not otherwise.—The next he met with, made no difficulty of smiting him, (*volenti non fit injuria*) and did it so that he *wounded him*, *ver. 37*. he fetched blood with the blow, it is likely, in his face.

(2.) Wounded as he was, and disguised with ashes that he might not be known to be a prophet, he made his application to the king in a story, whereby he charged himself with such a crime as the king was now guilty of in sparing Ben-hadad, and waits for the king's judgment upon it; the case in short is this, A prisoner taken in the battle, was committed to his custody, by a man, (we may suppose one that had authority over him as his superior officer) with this charge, *If he be missing, thy life shall pay for his life*, *ver. 39*. The prisoner has made his escape through his carelessness; Can the chancery in the king's breast relieve him against his captain, who demands his life in lieu of the prisoner's? By no means, saith the king, thou shouldst either not have undertaken the trust, or been more careful and faithful to it, there is no remedy, *currat lex*, thou hast forfeited thy bond, and execution must go out upon it; *so shall thy doom be, thy self hast decided it*.—Now the prophet has what he would have,

puts off his disguise, and is known by Ahab himself to be a prophet, *ver. 41.* and plainly tells him, *Thou art the man:* Is it my doom? No, it is thine; *thy self hast decided it;* out of thine own mouth art thou judged, God, thy superior and commander in chief, delivered into thy hands one plainly marked for destruction, both by his own pride, and God's providence, and thou hast not carelessly lost him, but wittingly and willingly dismissed him, and so hast been false to thy trust, and lost the end of thy victory, and therefore expect no other but that, *thy life shall go for his life,* which thou hast spared, (and so it did, *chap. xxii. 35.*) and thy people for his people, whom likewise thou hast spared, and so they did afterwards, *2 Kings x. 22, 23.* when their other sins brought them low, this came into the account. There is a time, when *keeping back the sword from blood, is doing the work of the Lord deceitfully,* Jer. xlviii. 10. Foolish pity spoils the city.

3. We are told how Ahab took this reproof, he *went to his house heavy and displeased,* *ver. 43.* not truly penitent, or seeking to undo what he had done amiss, but enraged at the prophet, exasperated against God, as if he had been too severe in the sentence passed upon him, and yet vexed at himself, every way out of humour, notwithstanding his victory; he that by his providence had mortified the pride of one king, by his word cast a damp upon the triumphs of another: *Be wise therefore, O ye kings, and be instructed to serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling,* Psal. ii. 10, 11.

C H A P. XXI.

Ahab is still the unhappy subject of the sacred history; from the great affairs of his camp and kingdom, this chapter leads us into his garden, and gives us an account of some ill things, (and ill indeed they proved to him) relating to his domestick affairs.
1. *Ahab is sick for Naboth's vineyard,* *ver. 1—4.* 2. *Naboth dies by Jezebel's plot, that the vineyard may escheat to Ahab,* *ver. 5—14.* 3. *Ahab goes to take possession,* *ver. 15, 16.* 4. *Elijah meets him, and denounceth the judgments of God against him for his injustice,* *ver. 17—24.* 5. *Upon his humiliation a reprieve is granted,* *ver. 25—29.*

1. **A**ND it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. 2. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house, and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it: or if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. 3. And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee. 4. And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased, because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers: and he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.

Here is, 1. Ahab coveting his neighbour's vineyard, which unhappily lay near his palace, and convenient for a kitchen garden; perhaps Naboth had been pleased, that he had a vineyard lay so advantageously for a prospect of the royal gardens, or the vending of its products to the royal family, but the situation of it proved fatal to him; if he had had no vineyard, or it had lain obscure in some remote place, he had preserved his life, but many a man's possessions have been his snare, and his neighbourhood to greatness of pernicious consequence.—Ahab sets his eye and heart on this vineyard, *ver. 12.* it will be a pretty addition to his demesns, a convenient out-let to his palace, and nothing will serve him but it must be his own, he is welcome to the fruits of it, welcome to walk in it; Naboth, perhaps, would have made him a lease of it for his life to please him, but nothing will please him unless he have an absolute property in it, to him and his heirs for ever; he is not such a tyrant as to take it by force, but fairly proposeth, either to give him the full value of it in money, or a better vineyard in exchange; he had tamely quitted the great advantages God had given him, of enlarging his dominion for the honour of his kingdom by his victory over the Syrians, and now is eager to enlarge his garden, only for the convenience of his house, as if to be penny wise, would atone for being pound foolish.—To desire a convenience to his estate was not evil, there would be no buying, if there were no desire of what is bought; the virtuous woman *considers a field and buys it;* but to desire any thing inordinately, though we would compass it by lawful means, is a fruit of selfishness, as if we must engross all the conveniencies, and none must live, or not live comfortably by us; contrary to the law of contentment, and the letter of the tenth commandment, *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house.*

2. The repulse he met with in this desire; Naboth would by no means part with it, *ver. 3.* *The Lord forbid it me,* and the Lord did forbid it, else he would not have been so rude and uncivil to his prince, as not to gratify him in so small a matter; Canaan was in a peculiar manner God's land, the Israelites were his tenants, now this was one of the conditions of their leases, that they should not alien, no not to one another, any part of that which fell to their lot, unless in case of extream necessity, and then but till the year of Jubilee, *Lev. xxv. 28.* Now Naboth foresaw, that if his vineyard were sold to the crown, it would never return to his heirs, no not in the Jubilee; he would gladly oblige the king, but he must obey God rather than men, and therefore, in this matter, desires to be excused; Ahab knew the law, or should have known it, and therefore did ill to ask that which his subject could not grant without sin; some conceive, that he looked upon his earthly inheritance as an earnest of his lot in the heavenly Canaan, and therefore would not part with the former, lest it should amount to a forfeiture of the latter; he seems to have been a conscientious man, who would rather hazard the king's displeasure, than offend God; and, probably, was one of the seven thousand that had not bowed the knee to Baal, for which, it may be, Ahab owed him a grudge.

3. Ahab's great discontent and uneasiness hereupon; he was as before, *chap. xx. 43.* *heavy and displeased,* *ver. 4.* grew melancholy upon it, threw himself upon his bed, would not eat, nor admit company to come to him; he could by no means digest the affront, his proud spirit aggravates the indignity Naboth did him in denying him, as a thing not to be suffered; curseth the squeamishness of his conscience, which he pretended to consult the peace of, and secretly meditates revenge? nor could he bear the disappointment, it cut him to the heart to be crossed in his desires, and he was perfectly sick for vexation. Note, 1. Discontent is a sin that is its own punishment, and makes men torment themselves; it makes the spirit sad, the body sick, and all the enjoyments sour, it is the heaviness of the heart, and the rottenness of the bones.—2. It is a sin that is its own parent, it arises not from the condition, but from the mind; as we find Paul content in a prison, so Ahab discontent in a palace, he had all the delights of Canaan, that pleasant land, at command, the wealth of a kingdom, the pleasures of a court, and the honours and powers of a throne, and yet *all this avails him nothing* without Naboth's vineyard; inordinate desires expose men to continual vexations, and they that are disposed to fret, be they never so happy, will always find something or other to fret at.

5. ¶ But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread? 6. And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard. 7. And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. 8. So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city dwelling with Naboth. 9. And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: 10. And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God, and the king: and then carry him out, and stone him that he may die. 11. And the men of his city, even the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, and as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them. 12. They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people. 13. And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died. 14. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned, and is dead. 15. ¶ And it came to pass when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead. 16. And it came to pass when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

Nothing but mischief is to be expected when Jezebel enters into the story, that cursed woman, *2 Kings ix. 34.*

1. Under pretence of comforting her afflicted husband she feeds his pride and passion, and blows the coals of his corruptions; it became her to take notice of his grief, and to enquire into the cause of it, *ver. 5.* Those have forgot both the duty and affection of the conjugal relation, that interest not themselves in each others troubles; he tells her what troubled him, *ver. 6.* yet invidiously conceals Naboth's reason for his refusal, representing it as peevish; when it was conscientious, *I will not give it thee*, whereas he said, *I may not.* What? (saith Jezebel, *ver. 7.*) *Dost thou govern Israel? Arise, and eat bread.* She doth well to persuade him to shake off his melancholy, and not to sink under his burthen, to be easy and cheerful; whatever was his grief, grieving would not redress it, but pleasantness would alleviate it; her plea is, *Dost thou now govern Israel?* This is capable of a good sense; Doth it become so great a prince as thou art to cast thy self down for so small a matter? thou shamest thy self, and profanest thy crown; it is below thee to take notice of so inconsiderable a thing. Art thou fit to govern Israel, who hast no better a government of thine own passions? Or hast thou so rich a kingdom at command, and canst not thou be without this one vineyard? We should learn to quiet our selves under our crosses with the thoughts of the mercies we enjoy, especially our hopes of the kingdom. But she meant it in an ill sense, *Dost thou govern Israel*, and shall any subject thou hast deny thee any thing thou hast a mind to? Art thou a king? It is below thee to buy and pay, much more to beg and pray; use thy prerogative, and take by force what thou canst not compass by fair means; instead of resenting the affront thus revenge it.—If thou knowest not how to king it thus, let me alone to do it, give me but leave to make use of thy name, and I will soon give thee the vineyard of Naboth, right or wrong it shall be thy own shortly, and cost thee nothing; unhappy princes those are, and hurried apace towards their ruin, who have those about them that stir them up to acts of tyranny, and teach them how to abuse their power.

2. In order to the gratifying of him, she projects and compasseth the death of Naboth; no less than his blood will serve to atone for the affront he had given to Ahab, which she thirsts after the more greedily because of his adherence to the law of the God of Israel; had she aimed only at his land, her false witnesses might have sworn him out of that by a forged deed, she could not have set up so weak a title, but the elders of Jezreel would have adjudged it good; but *the adulterers will hunt for the precious life*, Prov. vi. 26. Revenge is sweet, Naboth must die, and die as a malefactor, to gratify it.

(1.) Never were more wicked orders given by any prince than these which Jezebel sent to the magistrates of Jezreel, *ver. 8, 9, 10.* She borrows the privy-seal, but the king shall not know what she will do with it, it is probable this was not the first time he had lent it her, but with it she had signed warrants for the slaying of the prophets; she makes use of the king's name, knowing the thing would please him when it was done, yet fearing he might scruple the manner of doing it; in short, she commands them upon their allegiance to put Naboth to death, without giving them any reason why or wherefore; had she sent witnesses to inform against him, the judges (who must go *secundum allegata & probata*) might have been imposed upon, and their sentence had been rather their unhappiness than their crime, but to oblige them to find the witnesses, sons of Belial, to suborn them themselves, and then to give judgment upon a testimony which they knew to be false, was such an impudent defiance to every thing that is just and sacred, as we hope cannot be paralleled in any story; she must look upon the elders of Jezreel as men perfectly lost to every thing that is honest and honourable when she expected these orders should be obeyed; but she will put them in a way how to do it, having as much of the serpent's subtilty as she had of his poison.

1. It must be done *under colour of religion*.—*Proclaim a fast*, signify to your city that you are apprehensive of some dreadful judgment coming upon you, which you must endeavour to avert, not only by prayer, but by finding out and by putting away the accursed thing, take on you to be afraid that there is some great offender among you undiscovered, for whose sake God is angry with your city; charge the people, if they know of any such, on that solemn occasion to inform against him, as they tender the welfare of the city, and at last let Naboth be fastned upon as the suspected person, probably, because he doth not join with his neighbours in their worships: That may serve for a pretence to *set him on high among the people*, to call him to the bar, let proclamation be made, if any one can inform the court against the prisoner, and prove him to be the Achan, they shall be heard; and then let the witnesses appear to give evidence against him. Note, There is no wickedness so vile, so horrid, but religion has sometimes been made a cloke and cover for it. We must not think at all the worse of fasting and praying for their having been sometimes thus abused, but much the worse of those wicked designs that have at any time been carried on under the umbrage of them.

2. It must be done *under colour of justice* too, and with the formalities of a legal process. Had she sent to them to hire some of their banditti, some desperate ruffians to assassinate him, to stab

him as he went along the streets in the night, it had been bad enough; but to do it by a course of law, to use that power for the murdering of the innocent, which ought to be their protection, was such a *violent perverting of justice and judgment* as yet we are bid *not to marvel at*, Eccl. v. 8. The crime they must lay to his charge, was *blaspheming God and the king*; a complicated blasphemy. Sure she could not think to put a blasphemous sense upon the answer he had given to Ahab, as if denying him his vineyard were blaspheming the king, and giving the divine law for the reason, were blaspheming God. No, she pretends not any ground at all for the charge; though there was no colour of truth in it, though witnesses must swear it, and Naboth must not be permitted to speak for himself, or cross-examine the witnesses, but immediately, under pretence of a universal detestation of the crime, they must *carry him out and stone him*. His blaspheming God would be the forfeiture of his life, but not of his estate, and therefore he is also charged with treason, in *blaspheming the king*, for which his estate was to be confiscated, that so Ahab might have his vineyard.

(2.) Never were wicked orders more wickedly obeyed, than these were by the magistrates of Jezreel. They do not so much as dispute the command, or make any objections against it, though so palpably unjust; but punctually observed all the particulars of it, either because they feared Jezebel's cruelty, or because they hated Naboth's piety, or both: They did *as it was written in the letters*, *ver. 11, 12.* neither made any difficulty of it, nor met with any difficulty in it, but cleverly carried on the villainy, they stoned Naboth to death, *ver. 13.* and, as it should seem, his sons with him, or after him; for when God came to make inquisition for blood, we find that article in the account, *2 Kings ix. 26. I have seen the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons.* Perhaps they were secretly murdered, that they might not claim their father's estate, or complain of the wrong done him.—Let us take occasion from this sad story, (1.) To stand amazed at the wickedness of the wicked, and the power of Satan in the children of disobedience. What a holy indignation may we be filled with, to see *wickedness in the place of judgment*, Eccl. iii. 16. (2.) To lament the hard case of oppressed innocency, and to mingle our tears with *the tears of the oppressed that have no comforter*, while on the side of the oppressors there is power, Eccl. iv. 1. (3.) To commit the keeping of our lives and comforts to God, for innocency it self will not always be our security. (4.) To rejoice in the belief of a judgment to come, in which such wrong judgments as these will be called over. Now we see that *there be just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked*, Eccl. viii. 15. but all will be set to rights in the great day.

3. Naboth being taken off, Ahab takes possession of his vineyard. (1.) The elders of Jezreel sent notice to Jezebel very unconcernedly, sent it her as a piece of agreeable news, *Naboth is stoned, and is dead*, *ver. 14.* Here let us observe, that as obsequious as the elders of Jezreel were to Jezebel's orders which she sent from Samaria for the murder of Naboth, so obsequious were the elders of Samaria afterwards to Jehu's orders, which he sent from Jezreel for the murder of Ahab's seventy sons, only that was not done by course of law, *2 Kings x. 6, 7.* These tyrants that by their wicked orders debauch the consciences of their inferior magistrates, may perhaps find at last the wheel return upon them; and that those who will not stick to do one cruel thing for them, will be as ready to do another cruel thing against them. (2.) Jezebel, jocund enough that her plot succeeded so well, brings notice to Ahab, that *Naboth is not alive, but dead*, therefore *Arise, take possession of his vineyard*, *ver. 15.* He might have taken possession by one of his officers, but so pleased is he with this accession to his estate, that he will make a journey to Jezreel himself to enter upon it; and it should seem he went in state too, as if he had got some mighty victory, for Jehu remembers long after that he and Bidkar attended him at this time, *2 Kings ix. 25.* If Naboth's sons were all put to death, Ahab thought himself entitled to the estate, *ob defectum sanguinis* (as our law expresses it.) If not, yet Naboth dying as a criminal, he claimed it *ob delictum criminis*.—Or if neither would make him a good title, the absolute power of Jezebel will give it him, and who dares oppose it? Might oft prevails against right, and wonderful is the divine patience that suffers it to do so. God is certainly *of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*, and yet for a time *keeps silence when the wicked devours the man that is more righteous than he*, Hab. i. 13.

17. ¶ And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 18. Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. 19. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. 20. And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O

mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee : because thou hast sold thy self to work evil in the sight of the LORD. 21. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up, and left in Israel, 22. And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin. 23. And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. 24. Him that dieth in Ahab in the city, the dogs shall eat : and him that dieth in the field, shall the fowls of the air eat. 25. ¶ But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. 26. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. 27. And it came to pass when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly. 28. And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29. Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days : but in his sons days will I bring the evil upon his house.

In these verses we may observe,

1. The very ill character that is given of Ahab, ver. 25, 26. which comes in here to justify God in the heavy sentence passed upon him, and to shew, that though it was passed upon occasion of his sin in the matter of Naboth, (which David's sin in the matter of Uriah did too much resemble) yet God would not have punished him so severely, if he had not been guilty of many other sins, especially idolatry; whereas David, except in that one matter, did that which was right. But for Ahab, there was none like him; so ingenious and industrious in sin, and that made a trade of it. He sold himself to work wickedness, i. e. he made himself a perfect slave to his lusts, and was as much at their beck and command, as ever any servant was at his master's. He was wholly given up to sin, and upon condition he might have the pleasures of it, he would take the wages of it, which is death, Rom. vi. 23. Blessed Paul complains that he was sold under sin, Rom. vii. 14. as a poor captive against his will; but Ahab was voluntary, he sold himself to sin, of choice, and as his own act and deed, he submitted to the dominion of sin.—It made him the worse, and his sin no better, nor more excusable, that Jezebel his wife stirred him up to do wickedly, and made him in many respects worse than otherwise he would have been.—To what a pitch of impiety did he arrive, who had such tinder of corruption in his heart, and such a tempter in his bosom to strike fire into it. In many things he did ill, but he did most abominably in following idols, like the Canaanites; his immoralities were very provoking to God, but his idolatries were especially so. Israel's case was sad, when a prince of such a character as this reigned over them.

2. The message which Elijah was sent with to him, when he went to take possession of Naboth's vineyard, ver. 17, 18. Hitherto God kept silence, did not intercept Jezebel's letters, nor stay the process of the elders of Jezreel; but now Ahab is reproved, and his sin set in order before his eyes. (1.) The person sent is Elijah. A prophet of lower rank was sent with messages of kindness to him, chap. xx. 13. But the father of the prophets is sent to try him, and condemn him for his murder. (2.) The place is Naboth's vineyard; the time, just when he was taking possession of it; then and there must his doom be read him. By taking possession, he avowed all that was done, and made himself guilty, *ex post facto*. There he was taken in the manner, as it were, and therefore the conviction would come upon him with so much the more force. What hast thou to do in this vineyard? What good canst thou expect from it, when it is purchased with blood, Hab. ii. 12. and thou hast caused the owner thereof to lose his life? Job xxxi. 39. Now he was pleasing himself with his ill-got wealth, and giving direction for the turning of this vineyard into a flower-garden, his meat in his bowels is turned. He shall not feel quietness. When he is about to fill his belly, God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him, Job xx. 14, 20, 23. Let us see what past between them.

(1.) Ahab vents his wrath against Elijah, falls into a passion at the sight of him, and instead of humbling himself before the prophet, as he ought to have done, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 12. is ready to fly in his face, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? ver. 20. This shews, 1. That he hated him; the last time we found them together, they parted very good friends, chap. xviii. 46.

then Ahab had countenanced the reformation, and therefore then all was well between him and the prophet; but now he was relapsed, and worse than ever; his conscience told him he had made God his enemy, and therefore he could not expect Elijah should be his friend. Note, That man's condition is very miserable, that has made the word of God his enemy, and very desperate, that reckons the ministers of that word his enemies, because they tell him the truth, Gal. iv. 16. Ahab having sold himself to sin, was resolved to stand to his bargain, and could not endure him, that would have helped him to recover himself. 2. That he feared him. Hast thou found me? Intimating, that he thinned him all he could, and it was now a terror to him to see him. The sight of him was like that of the handwriting upon the wall to Belshazzar, it made his countenance change, the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another. Never was poor debtor or criminal so confounded at the sight of the officer that came to arrest him. Men may thank themselves, if they make God and his word a terror to them.

(2.) Elijah denounceth God's wrath against Ahab. I have found thee, (saith he, ver. 20.) because thou hast sold thy self to work evil. Note, Those that give up themselves to sin, will certainly be found out, sooner or later, to their unspeakable horror and amazement. Ahab is now set to the bar, as Naboth was, and trembles more than he did.

1. Elijah finds the indictment against him, and convicts him upon the notorious evidence of the fact, ver. 19. Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? He is here charged with the murder of Naboth; and it would not serve him to say the law killed him; perverted justice is the highest injustice: Or that if he were unjustly prosecuted, it was not his doing, he knew nothing of it, for it was to please him that it was done, and he had shewed himself pleased with it, and so had made himself guilty of all that was done in the unjust prosecution of Naboth. He killed, for he took possession. If he takes the garden, he takes the guilt with it. Terra transit cum onere: The land with the encumbrance.

2. He passeth judgment upon him, That his family should be ruined and rooted out, ver. 21. and all his posterity cut off. That his house should be made like the houses of his wicked predecessors, Jeroboam and Baasha, ver. 22. particularly, that they which died in the city should be dogs-meat, and they that died in the field birds-meat, ver. 24. which had been foretold of Jeroboam's house, chap. xiv. 11. and of Baasha's, chap. xvi. 4. That Jezebel particularly should be devoured by dogs, ver. 23. which was fulfilled, 2 Kings ix. 36. and for Ahab himself, that the dogs should lick his blood in the very same place where they licked Naboth's, ver. 19. Thy blood, even thine, though it be royal blood, though it swell thy veins with pride, and boil in thy heart with anger, ere long it shall be an entertainment for the dogs; which was fulfilled, chap. xxii. 38. This intimates that he should die a violent death, should come to his grave with blood, and that disgrace should attend him, the foresight of which must needs be a great mortification to a proud man. Punishments after death are here most insisted on, which though such as light on the body only, perhaps, were designed as figures of the soul's misery after death.

(3.) Ahab's humiliation under the sentence passed upon him, and the favourable message sent him thereupon.

1. Ahab was a piece of a penitent. The message Elijah delivered in God's name, put him into a fright for the present, so that he rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth, ver. 27. He was still a proud hardened sinner, and yet thus reduced. Note, God can make the stoutest heart to tremble, and the proudest to humble itself. His word is quick and powerful, and is, when he pleaseth to make it so, like a fire and a hammer, Jer. xxiii. 29. It made Felix tremble. Ahab put on the garb and guise of a penitent, and yet his heart was unhumiliated, and unchanged. After this, we find, he hated a faithful prophet, chap. xxii. 8. Note, It is no new thing to find the shew and profession of repentance, where yet there wants the truth and substance of it. Ahab's repentance was only what might be seen of men: Seest thou (saith God to Elijah) how Ahab humbles himself; it was external only; the garments rent, but not the heart. An hypocrite may go very far in the outward performances of holy duties, and yet come short.

2. He obtained hereby a reprieve, which I may call a piece of a pardon. Though it was but an outside repentance, lamenting the judgment only, and not the sin, though he did not leave his idols, nor restore the vineyard to Naboth's heirs, yet because he did hereby give some glory to God, God took notice of it, and bid Elijah take notice of it; Seest thou how Ahab humbles himself, ver. 29. In consideration of this, the threatened ruin of his house, which had not been fixed to any time, should be adjourned to his sons days. The sentence should not be revoked, but the execution suspended. Now, 1. This discovers the great goodness of God, and his readiness to shew mercy, which here rejoiceth against judgment. Favour is shewed to this wicked man, that God might magnify his goodness, (saith bishop Sanderson) even to the hazard of other his divine perfections; as if, (saith

(faith he) God would be thought unholy, or untrue, or unjust, (though he be neither so nor so) or any thing, rather than unmerciful. 2. This teaches us to take notice of that which is good, even in those that are not so good as they should be: Let it be commended as far as it goes. 3. This gives a reason why wicked people sometimes prosper long: God is rewarding their external services with external mercies. 4. This encourageth all those that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe the holy gospel. If a pretending partial penitent shall go to his house reprieved, doubtless, a sincere penitent shall go to his house justified.

C H A P. XXII.

This chapter finishes the history of Ahab's reign. It was promised in the close of the foregoing chapter, that the ruin of his house should not come in his days, but his days were soon at an end. His war with the Syrians at Ramoth-gilead is that which we have an account of in this chapter. 1. His preparations for that war. He consulted, (1.) His privy council, ver. 1—3. (2.) Jehoshaphat, ver. 4. (3.) His prophets. 1. His own, who encourages him to go on this expedition, ver. 5, 6. Zedekiah particularly, ver. 11, 12. 2. A prophet of the Lord, Micaiah, who was desired to come by Jehoshaphat, ver. 7, 8. sent for, ver. 9, 10, 13, 14. upbraided Ahab with his credulity of the false prophets, ver. 15. but foretold his fall in this expedition, ver. 16, 17, 18. and gave him an account how he came to be thus imposed upon by his prophets, ver. 19—23. He is abused by Zedekiah, ver. 24, 25. and imprisoned by Ahab, ver. 26—28. 2. The battle itself: In which, 1. Jehoshaphat is exposed. But, (2.) Ahab is slain, ver. 29—40. In the close of the chapter we have a short account, 1. Of the good reign of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, ver. 41—50. 2. Of the wicked reign of Ahaziah king of Israel, ver. 51—53.

1. **A**ND they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel. 2. And it came to pass in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel. 3. (And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?) 4. And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle, to Ramoth-gilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, *I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses.* 5. And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to day. 6. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king. 7. And Jehoshaphat said, *Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him?* 8. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, *There is yet one man (Micaiah the son of Imlah) by whom we may enquire of the LORD; but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.* And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. 9. Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, Hasten hither Micaiah the son of Imlah. 10. And the king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria, and all the prophets prophesied before them. 11. And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron: and he said, Thus saith the LORD, with these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them. 12. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the king's hand. 13. And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah, spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak *that which is good.* 14. And Micaiah said, *As the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak.*

Though Ahab continued under guilt and wrath, and the dominion of the lusts to which he had sold himself, yet as a reward for his professions of repentance and humiliation, though the time drew near when he should descend into battle and perish, yet we have him blessed with a three years peace, ver. 1. and an honourable visit made him by Jehoshaphat king of Judah, ver. 2. The Jews have a fabulous conceit, that when Ahab humbled

himself for his sin, and lay in sackcloth, he sent for Jehoshaphat to come to him to chastise him; and that he staid with him for some time, and gave him so many stripes every day. That is a groundless tradition. He came now, it is probable, to consult with him about the affairs of their kingdoms. It is strange, so great a man as Jehoshaphat would pay so much respect to a kingdom revolted from the house of David; and that so good a man would shew so much kindness to a king, revolted from the worship of God. But though he was a godly man, his temper was too easy, which betrayed him to snares and inconveniences.

The Syrians durst not give Ahab any disturbance. But,

1. Ahab here meditates a war against the Syrians, and advises concerning it with those about him, ver. 3. The king of Syria gave him the provocation; when he lay at his mercy, he promised to restore him his cities, chap. xx. 34. and Ahab foolishly took his word, when he ought not to have dismissed him, till the cities had been put into his possession: But now, he knows by experience, what he ought to have considered, that as the kisses, so the promises of an enemy are deceitful; and there is no confidence to be put in leagues extorted by distress. Ben-hadad is one of those princes, that thinks himself bound by his word no farther, and no longer than it is for his interest. Whether any other cities were restored, we do not find, but Ramoth-gilead was not; a considerable city in the tribe of Gad, on the other side Jordan, a Levites city, and one of the cities of refuge. Ahab blames himself, and his people, that they did not bestir themselves to recover it out of the hands of the Syrians, and to chastise Ben-hadad's violation of his league; and resolves to let that ungrateful perfidious prince know, that as he had given him peace, he could give him trouble. Ahab has a good cause, yet succeeds not. Equity is not to be judged of by prosperity.

2. He engages Jehoshaphat, and draws him in to join with him in this expedition, for the recovery of Ramoth-gilead, ver. 4. And here, I do not wonder, that Ahab should desire the assistance of so pious and prosperous a neighbour. Even bad men have often coveted the friendship of the good. It is desirable to have an interest in those that have an interest in heaven; and to have those with us, that have God with them. But it is strange, Jehoshaphat will go so entirely into Ahab's interests, as to say, *I am as thou art, and my people as thy people.*—I hope not; Jehoshaphat, and his people, are not so wicked and corrupt as Ahab and his people. Too great a complaisance to evil-doers, has brought many good people, through unwariness, into a dangerous fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. Jehoshaphat had like to have paid dear for his compliment, when in the battle he was taken for Ahab. Yet some observe, that in joining with Israel against Syria, he atoned for his father's fault, in joining with Syria against Israel, chap. xv. 19, 20.

3. At the special instance and request of Jehoshaphat, he asks counsel of the prophets concerning this expedition. Ahab thought it enough to consult with his statesman, but Jehoshaphat moves that they should enquire of the word of the Lord, ver. 5. Note, 1. Wherever a good man goes, he desires to take God along with him, and will acknowledge him in all his ways, ask leave of him, and look up to him for success. 2. Wherever a good man goes, he ought to take his religion along with him, and not be ashamed to own it, no not when he is with those who have no kindness for it. Jehoshaphat has not left behind him at Jerusalem his affection and veneration for the word of the Lord, but both avows it, and endeavours to introduce it into Ahab's court. If Ahab drew him into his wars, he will draw Ahab into his devotions.

4. Ahab's four hundred prophets, the standing regiment he had of them; prophets of the groves they called them, agreed to encourage him in this expedition, and to assure him of success, ver. 6. He put the question to them with a seeming fairness, *Shall I go, or shall I forbear?* But they knew which way his inclination was, and designed nothing else but to humour the two kings. To please Jehoshaphat, they made use of the name Jehovah, he shall deliver it into the hand of the king; they stole the word from the true prophets, Jer. xxiii. 30. and spoke their language. To please Ahab, they bid him Go up. They had, indeed, probabilities on their side; Ahab had not long since beaten the Syrians twice; he had now a good cause, and was much strengthened by his alliance with Jehoshaphat; but they pretend to speak by prophecy, not by rational conjecture; by divine, not human foresight: Thou shalt certainly recover Ramoth-gilead. Zedekiah, a leading man among these prophets, in imitation of the true prophets, illustrated his false prophecy with a sign, ver. 11. He made him a pair of iron horns, representing the two kings, and their honour and power, (both which were signified by horns, exaltation and force) and with these the Syrians must be pushed. All the prophets agreed, as one man, that Ahab should return from this expedition a conqueror, ver. 12. Unity is not always the mark of a true church, and true ministry. Here were four hundred men that prophesied with one mind, and one mouth, and yet all in an error.

5. Jeho-

5. Jehoshaphat cannot relish this sort of preaching; it is not like what he was used to; the false prophets cannot so mimic the true, but that he who had spiritual senses exercised, could discern the fallacy, and therefore he enquires for a *prophet of the Lord besides*, ver. 7. He is too much a courtier to say any thing by way of reflection on the king's chaplains, but he waits to see a *prophet of the Lord*; intimating, that he could not look upon these to be so. They *seemed to be somewhat*, (whatever they were, it made no matter to him) but however in conference, they *added nothing to him*, they gave him no satisfaction, (alluding to *Gal. ii. 6.*) One faithful prophet of the Lord was worth them all.

6. Ahab has another, but one he hates, Micaiah by name, and to please Jehoshaphat he is willing to have him sent for, ver. 8, 9, 10. Ahab owned they might *enquire of the Lord by him*, that he was a true prophet, and one that knew God's mind. And yet, 1. He hated him, and was not ashamed to own to the king of Judah that he did so, and to give this for his reason, he *doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil*. And whose fault was that? If Ahab had done well, he had heard nothing but well from heaven: if he do ill, he may thank himself for all the uneasiness which the reproofs and threats of God's word give him. Note, Those are wretchedly hardened in sin, and are ripening apace for ruin, who hate God's ministers because they deal plainly with them, and faithfully warn them of their misery and danger by reason of sin, and reckon those their enemies that *tell them the truth*. 2. He had (as it should seem) imprisoned him; for when he committed him, ver. 26. he bid the officer carry him back, *viz.* to the place from whence he came. We may suppose, that this was he that reproved him for his clemency to Ben-hadad, *chap. xx. 38.* and for that was cast into prison, where he had lain these three years. And that was the reason Ahab knew where to find him so readily, ver. 9. But his imprisonment had not excluded him from divine visits, the spirit of prophecy continued with him there, he was bound, but *the word of the Lord was not*: Nor did it in the least abate his courage, or make him less confident or faithful in delivering his message. Jehoshaphat gave too gentle a reproof to Ahab, for expressing his indignation against a faithful prophet, *Let not the king say so*, ver. 8. He should have said, Thou art unjust to the prophet, unkind to thy self, and puttest an affront upon his Lord and thine, in saying so. Such sinners as Ahab must be rebuked sharply. However, he so far yielded to the reproof, that for fear of provoking Jehoshaphat, to break off from his alliance with him, he orders Micaiah to be sent for with all speed, ver. 9. The two kings sat each in their robes and chairs of state, in the gate of Samaria, ready to receive this poor prophet, and to hear what he has to say; for many will give God's word the hearing, that will not lend it an obedient ear. They were attended with a crowd of flattering prophets, that could not think of prophesying any thing but what was very sweet, and very smooth, to two such glorious princes now in confederacy. They that love to be flattered, shall not want flatterers.

Lastly, Micaiah is pressed by the officer that fetched him to follow the cry, ver. 13. That officer was unworthy the name of an Israelite, who pretended to prescribe to a prophet, but he thought him altogether such a one as the rest, who studied to please men, and not God. He tells him how unanimous the other prophets were in foretelling the king's good success; how agreeable it was to the king; that it was his interest to say as they said, he might gain not only enlargement, but preferment by it. They that dote upon worldly things themselves, think every body else should do so too, and, true or false, right or wrong, speak and act for their secular interest only. He intimates likewise, that it would be to no purpose to contradict such a numerous and unanimous vote; he would be ridiculed, as affecting a foolish singularity if he should. But Micaiah knows better things, protests it, and backs his protestation with an oath, that he will deliver his message from God with all faithfulness, whether it be pleasing or displeasing to his prince, ver. 14. *What the Lord saith to me, that will I speak*, without addition, diminution, or alteration. Bravely resolved! and as became one who had his eye to a greater King than either of these, arrayed with brighter robes, and sitting on a higher throne.

15. ¶ So he came to the king, and the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king. 16. And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee, that thou tell me nothing but *that which is true* in the name of the LORD? 17. And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master, let them return every man to his house in peace. 18. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but

evil? 19. And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him, on his right hand, and on his left. 20. And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. 21. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him. 22. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. 23. Now therefore behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee. 24. But Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near, and smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way went the spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee? 25. And Micaiah said, Behold thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thy self. 26. And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son: 27. And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction, and with water of affliction, until I come in peace. 28. And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, Harken, O people, every one of you.

Here Micaiah doth well, but, as is common, suffers ill for so doing.

(1.) We are here told how faithfully he delivered his message, as one that was more solicitous to please God, than to humour either the great or the many. Three ways he delivers his message, and all displeasing to Ahab.

1. He speaks as the rest of the prophets did, but ironically, *Go, and prosper*, ver. 15. Ahab put the same question to him that he had put to his own prophets, *shall we go, or shall we forbear?* Seeming desirous to know God's mind, when, like Balaam, he was strongly bent to do his own, which Micaiah plainly took notice of, when he bid him go, but with such an air of pronunciation, as plainly shewed he spake it by way of derision; *q. d.* I know you are determined to go, and I hear your own prophets are unanimous in assuring you of success; go then, and take what follows. They say, *the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king*; but I do not tell thee that *thus saith the Lord*; no, he saith otherwise. Note, Those deserve to be bantered that love to be flattered; and it is just with God to give up those to their own counsels that give up themselves to their own lusts, *Ecc. xi. 9.* In answer to this, Ahab adjures him to tell him the truth, and not to jest with him, ver. 16. as if he sincerely desired to know both what God would have him do, and what he would do with him; yet intending to represent the prophet as a perverse ill-humoured man, that would not tell him the truth till he was thus put to his oath, or adjured to do it.

2. Being thus pressed, he plainly foretold, that the king would be cut off in this expedition, and his army scattered, ver. 17. He saw them in a vision, or dream, dispersed upon the mountains, as sheep that have no one to guide them: *smite the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered*, Zech. xiii. 7. This intimates, (1.) That Israel should be deprived of their king, who was their shepherd; God took notice of it, *these have no master*. (2.) That they would be obliged to retire, *re infecta*. He doth not foresee any great slaughter in the army, but that they should make a dishonourable retreat; *let them return every man to his house in peace*; put into disorder indeed for the present, but no great losers by the death of their king: He shall fall in war, but they shall go home in peace. Thus Micaiah in his prophecy testified what he had seen and heard, let them take it how they pleased, while the others prophesied purely *out of their own hearts*, see *Jer. xxiii. 28.* The prophet that has a dream, let him tell that, and so quote his authority; and he that has my word, let him speak my word faithfully, and not his own; for *what is the chaff to the wheat?* — Now Ahab finds himself aggrieved, turns to Jehoshaphat, and appeals to him, whether Micaiah had not manifestly a spite to him, ver. 18. They that bear malice to others, are generally willing to believe that they bear malice to them, though they have no cause for it, and therefore to put the worst constructions upon all they say. What evil did Micaiah prophesy to Ahab, in telling him if he proceeded in this expedition it would be fatal to him, while he might choose whether he would proceed in it or no? The greatest kindness we can do to one that is going in a dangerous way, is to tell him of his danger.

3. He gave the king an account whence it was that all his prophets encouraged him to proceed, that God permitted Satan, by them, to deceive him into his ruin, and he, by vision, knew of it; it was represented to him, and he represented it to Ahab, That the God of heaven had determined he should fall at Ramoth-gilead, *ver.* 19, 20. that the favour he had wickedly shewed to Ben-hadad might be punished by him and his Syrians, and that he being in some doubt, whether he should go to Ramoth-gilead or no, and resolving to be advised by his prophets, they should persuade him to it, and prevail, *ver.* 21, 22. and hence it was that they encouraged him with so much assurance, *ver.* 23. it was a lie from the father of lies, but by divine permission; this matter is here represented after the manner of men; we are not to imagine, that God is ever put upon new counsels, or is ever at a loss for means whereby to effect his purposes, nor that he needs to consult with angels, or any creature about the methods he should take, nor that he is the author of sin, or the cause of any man's either telling or believing a lie; but besides what was intended by this, with reference to Ahab himself, it is to teach us, 1. That God is a great King above all kings, and has a throne above all the thrones of earthly princes; you have your thrones, (saith Micaiah to these two kings) and you think you may do what you will, and we must all say as you would have us, but *I saw the Lord sitting upon his throne*, and every man's judgment proceeding from him, and therefore I must say as he saith; he is not a man as you are.—2. That he is continually attended and served by an innumerable company of angels, those heavenly hosts, who stand by him, ready to go where he sends them, and to do what he bids them, messengers of mercy on his right hand, of wrath on his left hand to some. 3. That he not only takes cognizance of, but presides in all the affairs of this lower world, and over-rules them according to the counsel of his own will; the rise and fall of princes, the issues of war, and all the great affairs of state, which are the subject of the consultations of wise and great men, are no more above God's direction, than the meanest concerns of the poorest cottages are below his notice. 4. God has many ways of bringing about his own counsels, particularly, concerning the fall of sinners when they are ripe for ruin, he can do it either on this manner, or on that manner. 5. That there are malicious and lying spirits, which go about continually seeking to devour, and in order to that seeking to deceive, and especially to put lies into the mouths of prophets, by them to entice many to their destruction. 6. It is not without the divine permission that the devil deceives men, and even thereby God serves his own purposes, *With him is strength and wisdom, the deceived and the deceiver are his*, Job xii. 16. When he pleaseth, for the punishment of those who receive not the truth in the love of it, he not only lets Satan loose to deceive them, *Rev.* xx. 7, 8. but gives men up to strong delusions to believe him, *2 Thess.* ii. 11, 12. 7. Those are manifestly marked for ruin, that are thus given up; God has certainly spoken evil concerning those whom he has given up to be imposed upon by lying prophets; thus Micaiah gave Ahab fair warning not only of the danger of proceeding in this war, but of the danger of believing those that encouraged him to proceed; thus we are warned to beware of false prophets, and to try the spirits; the lying spirit never deceives so fatally, as in the mouth of prophets.

2. We are here told, how he was abused for delivering his message thus faithfully, thus plainly, in a way so very proper both to convince and to affect.

(1.) Zedekiah, a wicked prophet, impudently insulted him in the face of the court, smote him on the cheek, to reproach him, to silence him and stop his mouth, and to express his indignation at him; (thus was our blessed Saviour abused, *Matt.* xxvi. 67. that Judge of Israel, *Mic.* v. 1.) and as if he not only had the Spirit of the Lord, but the monopoly of this Spirit, that he might not go without his leave, he asks, *Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak to thee?* *ver.* 24. The false prophets were always the worst enemies the true prophets had, and not only stirred up the government against them, but were themselves abusive to them, as Zedekiah here; to strike within the verge of the court, especially in the king's presence, is looked upon by our law as a high misdemeanor, yet this wicked prophet gives this abuse to a prophet of the Lord, and is not reprimanded or bound to his good behaviour for it; Ahab was pleased with it, and Jehoshaphat had not courage to appear for the injured prophet, pretending it was out of his jurisdiction; but Micaiah, though he returns not his blow, (God's prophets are no strikers, nor persecutors, dare not avenge themselves, render blow for blow, or be any way accessory to the breach of the peace) yet since he boasted so much of the Spirit, as those commonly do, that know least of his operations, he leaves him to be convinced of his error by the event, *Thou shalt know when thou hidest thyself in an inner chamber*, *ver.* 25. It is likely, Zedekiah went with Ahab to the battle, and took his horns of iron with him, to encourage the soldiers, to see with pleasure the accomplishment of his prophecy, and return in triumph with the king; but the army being routed, he fled among the rest from the sword of the enemy, sheltered himself as Ben-hadad had

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done, in a chamber within a chamber, chap. xx. 38. lest he should perish, as he knew he deserved to do, with those whom he had deluded, as Balaam did, *Numb.* xxxi. 8. and lest the blind prophet should fall into the ditch, with the blinded prince whom he had misled.—Note, Those that will not have their mistakes rectified in time by the word of God, will be undeceived, when it is too late, by the judgments of God.

2. Ahab, that wicked king, committed him to prison, *ver.* 27. not only ordered him to be taken into custody, or remitted to the jail from whence he came, but to be fed with bread and water, coarse bread and puddle water, till he should return; not doubting but he should return a conqueror, and then he would put him to death for a false prophet, *ver.* 27. Hard usage for one that would have prevented his ruin, but by this it appeared, that God had determined to destroy him; as *2 Chron.* xxv. 16. How confident is Ahab of success! He questions not but to return in peace, forgetting what he himself had minded Ben-hadad of, *Let not him that girdeth on the harness boast*; but there was little likelihood of his coming home in peace, when he left one of God's prophets behind him in prison; Micaiah puts it upon the issue, and calls all the people to be witnesses that he did so, *If thou return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me*, *ver.* 28. Let me incur the reproach and punishment of a false prophet, if the king come home alive; he run no hazard by this appeal, for he knew whom he had believed; he that is terrible to the kings of the earth, and treads upon princes as mortar, will rather let thousands of them fall to the ground, than one jot or tittle of his own word; he will not fail to confirm the word of his servants, *Isa.* xlv. 26.

29. So the king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, went up to Ramoth-gilead. 30. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and enter into the battle, but put thou on thy robes. And the king of Israel disguised himself, and went into the battle. 31. But the king of Syria commanded his thirty and two captains that had rule over his chariots, saying, Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel. 32. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, Surely it is the king of Israel. And they turned aside to fight against him: and Jehoshaphat cried out. 33. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him. 34. And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host, for I am wounded. 35. And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot. 36. And there went a proclamation throughout the host, about the going down of the sun, saying, Every man to his city, and every man to his own country. 37. ¶ So the king died, and was brought to Samaria, and they buried the king in Samaria. 38. And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, and they washed his armour, according unto the word of the LORD which he spake. 39. Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house which he made, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 40. So Ahab slept with his fathers, and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead.

The matter in contest between God's prophet and Ahab's prophets is here soon determined, and it is made to appear which was in the right. Here,

1. The two kings march with their forces to Ramoth-gilead, *ver.* 29. That the king of Israel, who hated God's prophet, should so far disbelieve his admonition, as to persist in his resolution notwithstanding, is not strange, but that Jehoshaphat, that pious prince, who had desired to enquire by a prophet of the Lord, as disrelishing and discrediting Ahab's prophets, should yet proceed, after so fair a warning, is to be admired; but by the easiness of his temper he was carried away with the delusion, (as Barnabas was with the dissimulation, *Gal.* ii. 13.) of his friends; he gave too much heed to Ahab's prophets, because they pretended to speak from God too, and in his country he had never been imposed upon by such cheats; he was ready to give his opinion with the major vote, and to conclude, it was four hundred to one but they should succeed; Micaiah had not forbidden them to go, nay, at first he said, *Go, and prosper*; if it came

came to the worst, it was only Ahab's fall that was foretold, and therefore hoped he might safely venture.

2. Ahab contrives to secure himself and expose his friend, *ver. 30. I will disguise my self*, and go in the habit of a common soldier, but let *Jehoshaphat put on his robes*, to appear in the dress of a general.—He pretended hereby to do honour to Jehoshaphat, and to compliment him with the sole command of the army in this action, he shall direct and give orders, and Ahab will serve as a soldier under him; but intended, (1.) To make a liar of a good prophet, thus he hoped to elude the danger, and so to defeat the threatening, as if by disguising himself he could escape the divine cognizance, and the judgments that pursued him. (2.) To make a fool of a good king, whom he did not cordially love, because he was one that adhered to God, and so condemned his apostasy; he knew if any perished it must be the shepherd, so Micaiah had foretold; and perhaps he had intimation of the charge the enemy had to fight chiefly *against the king of Israel*, and therefore basely intended to betray Jehoshaphat to the danger that he might secure himself; Ahab was marked for ruin, one would not have been in his coat for a great deal, yet he will overpersuade this godly king to muster for him; see what they get, that join in affinity with vicious men, whose consciences are debauched, and that are lost to every thing that is honourable; how can it be expected he should be true to his friend that has been false to his God.

3. Jehoshaphat, having more piety than policy, put himself into the post of honour, though it was the post of danger, and was thereby brought into peril of his life, but God graciously delivered him; the king of Syria charged his captains to level their force, not against the king of Judah, for with him he had no quarrel, but with the king of Israel only, *ver. 31. to aim at his person*, as if against him he had a particular enmity; now Ahab was justly repayed for sparing Ben-hadad, who, as the seed of the serpent commonly do, stung the bosom in which he was fostered and saved from perishing; some think he designed only to have him taken prisoner, that he might now give him as honourable a treatment as he had formerly received from him.—Whatever was the reason, this charge the officers received, and endeavoured to oblige their prince in this matter, for seeing Jehoshaphat in his royal habit they took him for the king of Israel, and surrounded him. Now, 1. By his danger, God let him know that he was displeased with him, for joining in confederacy with Ahab; he had said in compliment to Ahab, *ver. 4. I am as thou art*, and now he was indeed taken for him; they that associate with evil doers, are in danger of sharing in their plagues. 2. By his deliverance God let him know, that though he was displeased with him, yet he had not deserted him; some of the captains that knew him, perceived their mistake, and so retired from the pursuit of him; but it is said, *2 Chron. xviii. 31. God moved them*, (for he has all hearts in his hand) *to depart from him*; to him he cried out, not in cowardice, but devotion, and from him his relief came; Ahab was in no care to succour him; God is a friend that will not fail us, when other friends do.

4. Ahab received his mortal wound in the battle, notwithstanding his endeavours to secure himself in the habit of a private sentinel; let no man think to hide himself from God's judgments, no, not in masquerade; *Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies*, whatever disguise they are in, *ver. 34.* The Syrian that shot him, little thought of doing such a piece of service to God and his king, for he *drew a bow at a venture*, not aiming particularly at any man, yet God so directed the arrow, that, (1.) He hit the right person, the man that was marked for destruction, whom, if they had taken alive, as was designed, perhaps Ben-hadad would have spared; those cannot escape with life, whom God hath doomed to death. (2.) He hit him in the right place, *between the joints of the harness*, the only place about him where this arrow of death could find entrance; no armour is of proof against the darts of divine vengeance; case the criminal in steel, and it is all one, *be that made him, can make his sword to approach to him*; that which to us seems altogether casual, is done by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God.

5. The army was divided by the enemy, and sent home by the king; either Jehoshaphat or Ahab ordered the retreat of the sheep, when the shepherd was smitten. *Every man to his city*, for it is to no purpose to attempt any thing more, *ver. 36.* Ahab himself lived long enough to see that part of Micaiah's prophecy accomplished, *That all Israel should be scattered upon the mountains of Gilead*, *ver. 17.* and perhaps with his dying lips did himself give orders for it; for though he would be carried out of the army to have his wounds dressed, *ver. 34.* yet he would be *layed up in his chariot*, to see if his army were victorious; but when he saw the battle increase against them, his spirits sunk, and he died, but his death was so lingering, that he had time to feel himself die; and we may well imagine, with what horror he now reflected upon the wickedness he had committed, the warnings he had slighted, Baal's altars, Naboth's vineyard, Micaiah's imprisonment; now he sees himself flattered into his own ruin, and Zedekiah's horns of iron pushing not the

Syrians, but himself into destruction; thus is he brought to the king of terrors without hope in his death.

6. The royal corps was brought to Samaria, and buried there, *ver. 37.* and thither was brought the bloody chariot and bloody armour in which he died, *ver. 38.* and one particular circumstance is taken notice of, because there was in it the accomplishment of a prophecy, that when they brought the chariot to the pool of Samaria to be washed, the dogs (and swine, saith the Septuagint) gathered about it, and, as is usual, *licked the blood*, or, as some think, the water in which it was washed, with which the blood was mingled; the dogs made no difference between royal blood and other blood; now Naboth's blood was avenged, *chap. xxi. 19.* and that word of David, as well as Elijah's word was fulfilled, *Psal. lxxviii. 23. That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same*; the dogs licking the guilty blood was perhaps designed to represent the terrors that prey upon the guilty soul after death.

Lastly, The story of Ahab is here concluded in the usual form, *ver. 39, 40.* Among his works, mention is made of an ivory house which he built, so called, because it was in many places inlaid with ivory, perhaps, it was intended to vie with the stately palace of the kings of Judah, which Solomon built.

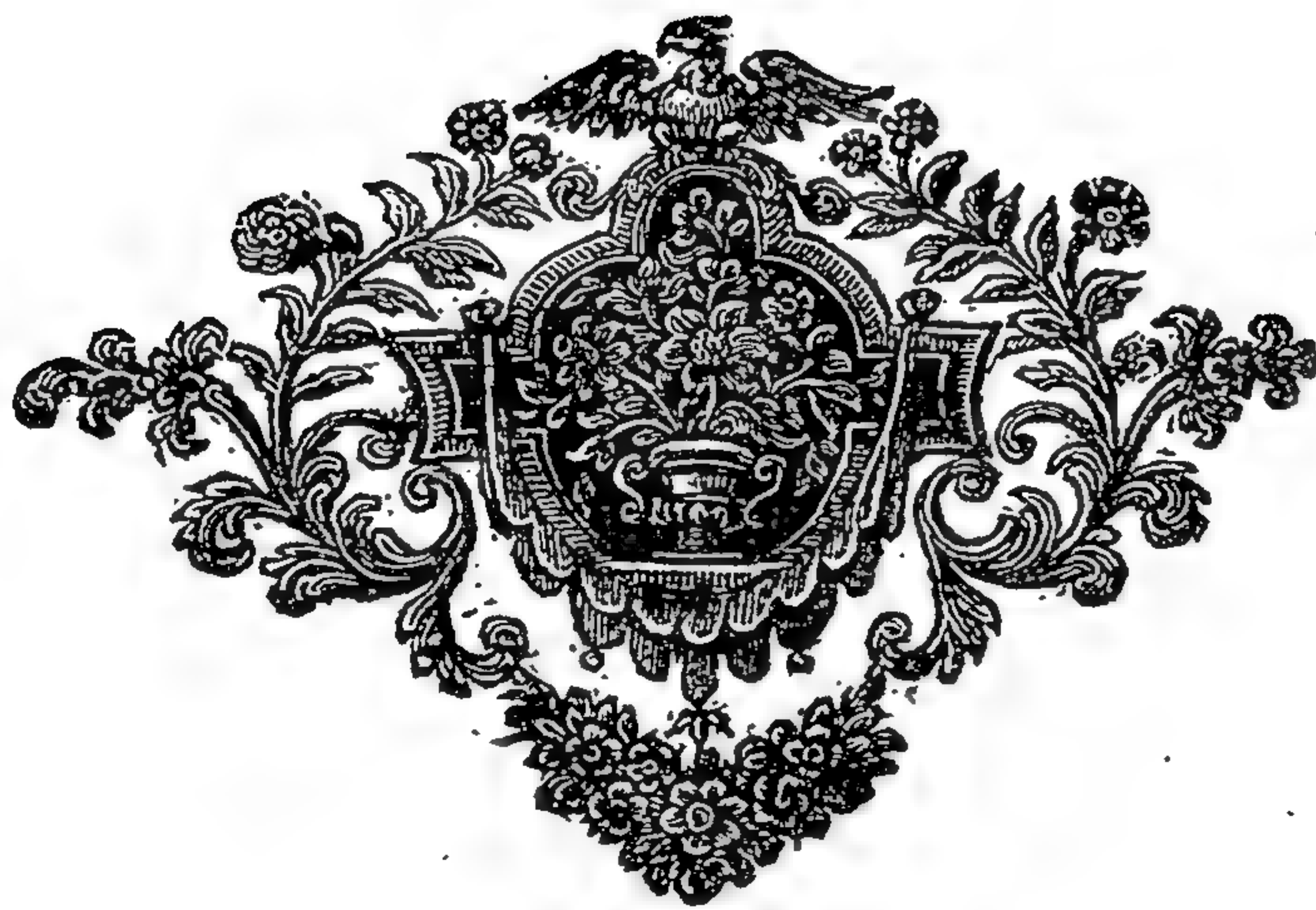
41. ¶ And Jehoshaphat the son of Aza began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel. 42. Jehoshaphat was thirty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem: and his mothers name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. 43. And he walked in all the way of Aza his father, he turned not aside from it, doing *that which was right* in the eyes of the LORD: nevertheless, the high places were not taken away; *for* the people offered and burnt incense yet in the high places. 44. And Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel. 45. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, and his might that he shewed, and how he warred, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 46. And the remnant of the sodomites which remained in the days of his father Aza, he took out of the land. 47. *There was* then no king in Edom: a deputy was king. 48. Jehoshaphat made ships of Tharshish to go to Ophir for gold: but they went not; for the ships were broken at Ezion-geber. 49. Then said Ahaziah the son of Ahab unto Jehoshaphat, Let my servants go with thy servants in the ships: but Jehoshaphat would not. 50. ¶ And Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Jehoram his son reigned in his stead. 51. ¶ Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel. 52. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. 53. For he served Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked to anger the LORD God of Israel, according to all that his father had done.

Here is, 1. A short account of the reign of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, which we shall have a much fuller narrative of, in the book of chronicles, and of the greatness and goodness of that prince, neither of which were lessened or sullied by any thing but his intimacy with the house of Ahab, which, upon several accounts, was a diminution to him; his confederacy with Ahab in war we have already found dangerous to him, and his confederacy with Ahaziah his son in trade sped no better, he offered to go partner with him in a fleet of merchant ships, that should fetch gold from Ophir, as Solomon's navy did, *ver. 48.* see *2 Chron. xx. 35, 36.* but while they were preparing to set sail, they were exceedingly damaged and disabled by a storm, broken in Ezion-geber, which a prophet gave Jehoshaphat to understand was a rebuke to him for his league with wicked Ahaziah, *2 Chron. xx. 37.* and therefore, as we are told here, *ver. 49.* when Ahaziah desired a second time to go partner with him, or, if that could not be obtained, that he might but send his servants with some effects on board Jehoshaphat's ships, he refused, *Jehoshaphat would not*, the rod of God expounded by the word of God, had effectually broke him off from his confederacy with that ungodly unhappy prince; better buy wisdom dear, than be without it; but experience is therefore said to be the mistress of fools, because they are fools that will not learn till they are taught by experience, and particularly, till they are taught the danger of associating with wicked people.

Now Jehoshaphat's reign appears here to have been none of the longest, but one of the best. 1. It was *none of the longest*, for he reigned but twenty five years, *ver. 42.* but then it was in the prime of his time, between thirty five and sixty, and these twenty five, added to his father's happy forty one, give us a grateful idea of the flourishing condition of the kingdom of Judah, and of religion in it, for a great while, even when things were very bad upon all accounts in the kingdom of Israel.—If Jehoshaphat reigned not so long as his father, to balance that he had not those blemishes on the latter end of his reign that his father had, *2 Chron. xvi. 9, 10, 12.* and it is better for a man that has been in reputation for wisdom and honour, to die in the midst of it than to outlive it.—(2.) Yet it was one of the best, both in respect of piety and prosperity. 1. He did well, he *did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord*, *ver. 43.* observed the commands of his God, and trod in the steps of his good father, and persevered herein, he *turned not aside from it*; yet every man's character has some *but* or other, so had his, the *high places were not taken away*, no, not out of Judah and Benjamin, though those tribes lay near Jerusalem, and they might easily bring their offerings and incense to the altar there, and could not pretend, as some other of the tribes, the inconveniency of lying remote; but old corruptions are hardly rooted out, especially when they have formerly had the patronage of those that were good, as the high places had of Samuel, Solomon, and some others. 2. His affairs did well, he prevented the mischiefs which had attended their

wars with the kingdom of Israel, establishing a lasting peace, *ver. 44.* which had been a greater blessing if he had contented himself with a peace, and not carried it on to an affinity with Israel; he put a deputy or vice-roy in Edom, so that that kingdom was a tributary to him, *ver. 47.* and therein the prophecy, concerning Esau and Jacob was fulfilled, that *the elder should serve the younger*; and in general mention is made of his might and his wars, *ver. 45.* he pleased God, and God blessed him with strength and success; his death is spoken of, *ver. 50.* to shut up his story, yet in the history of the kings of Israel we find mention of him afterwards, *2 Kings iii. 7.*

2. The beginning of the story of Ahaziah the son of Ahab, *ver. 51—53.* his reign was very short, not two years; some sinners God makes quick work with; it is a very ill character that is here given him, he not only kept up Jeroboam's idolatry, but the worship of Baal likewise; though he had heard of the ruin of Jeroboam's family, and had seen his own father drawn in to his own destruction by the prophets of Baal, who had oft been proved false prophets, yet he received no instruction, took no warning, but followed the example of his wicked father, and the counsel of his more wicked mother Jezebel, who was still living; miserable are the children that not only derive a stock of corruption from their parents, but are thus taught by them to trade with it; and unhappy, most unhappy parents, they that help to damn their childrens souls.



A N

E X P O S I T I O N

Of the Second BOOK of

K I N G S.

W I T H

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS.

This second book of the Kings (which the Septuagint, numbring from Samuel, call the fourth) is a continuation of the former book; and, some think, might better have been made to begin with the fifty first verse of the foregoing chapter, where the reign of Abaziah begins. The former book had an illustrious beginning in the glories of the kingdom of Israel, when it was entire; this has a melancholy conclusion, in the desolations of the kingdoms of Israel first, and then of Judah, after they had been long broken into two; for a kingdom divided against itself, cometh to destruction. But Elijah's mighty works were very much the glory of the former book, towards the latter end of it; so were Elisha's the glory of this towards the beginning of it.—These prophets out-scone their princes; and therefore as far as they go, the history shall be accounted for in them. Here is, 1. Elijah fetching fire from heaven, and ascending in fire to heaven, chap. i, and ii. 2. Elisha working many miracles, both for prince and people, Israelites and foreigners, chap. iii—vii. 3. Hazael and Jehu anointed, the former for the correction of Israel, the latter for the destruction of the house of Ahab, and the worship of Baal, chap. viii—x. 4. The reigns of several of the kings, both of Judah and Israel, chap. xi—xvi. 5. The captivity of the ten tribes, chap. xvii. 6. The good and glorious reign of Hezekiah, chap. xviii—xx. 7. Manasseh's wicked reign, and Josiah's good one, chap. xxi—xxiii. 8. The destruction of Jerusalem by the king of Babylon, chap. xxiv, xxv. This history, in the several passages of it, confirms that observation of Solomon's, That righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people.

C H A P. I.

We here find Abaziah, the genuine son and successor of Ahab, on the throne of Israel. His reign continued not two years; he died by a fall in his own house; which, after the mention of the revolt of Moab, ver. 1. we have here an account of, (1.) The message, which on that occasion, he sent to the god of Ekron, ver. 2. (2.) The message he received from the God of Israel, ver. 3—8. (3.) The destruction of the messengers he sent to seize the prophet once and again, ver. 9—12. (4.) His compassion to, and compliance with the third messenger upon his submission, and the delivery of the message to the king himself, ver. 13—16. (5.) The death of Abaziah, ver. 17, 18. In the story, we may observe how great the prophet looks, and how little the prince.

1. **T**HEN Moab rebelled against Israel, after the death of Ahab. 2. And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover of this disease. 3. But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, *Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baal-zebub the*

god of Ekron? 4. Now therefore thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And Elijah departed. 5. ¶ And when the messengers turned back unto him, he said unto them, Why are ye now turned back? 6. And they said unto him, There came a man up to meet us, and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, *Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron?* therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. 7. And he said unto them, What manner of man *was he* which came up to meet you, and told you these words? 8. And they answered him, *He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins.* And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite.

We have here, Ahaziah, the wicked king of Israel, under God's rebukes, both by his providence, and by his prophet; by his rod, and by his word.

1. He is crossed in his affairs. How can those expect to prosper, that do evil in the sight of the Lord, and provoke him to anger? When he rebelled against God, and revolted from his allegiance to him, Moab rebelled against Israel, and revolted from the subjection they had long paid to the kings of Israel, ver. 1. The

The Edomites that bordered on Judah, and were tributaries to the kings of Judah, still continued so, as we find in the chapter before, *ver.* 47. till in the wicked reign of Joram they broke that yoke, *chap.* viii. 22. as the Moabites did now. If men break their covenants with us, and withdraw their duty, we must reflect upon our breach of covenant with God, and the neglect of our duty to him. Sin weakens and impoverisheth us. We shall hear of the Moabites, *chap.* iii. 5.

2. He is seized with sickness in body, not from any inward cause, but by an ill accident; *He fell down through a lattice*, and was ill bruised with the fall; perhaps it threw him into a fever, *ver.* 2. Wherever we go, there is but a step between us and death. A man's house is his castle, but not to secure him against the judgments of God. The cracked lattice is as fatal to the son, when God pleaseth to make it so, as the bow drawn at a venture was to the father. Ahaziah would not attempt to reduce the Moabites, lest he should perish in the field of battle; but he is not safe though he tarry at home. Royal palaces do not always yield firm footing. The snare is laid for the sinner in the ground, where he thinks least of it, *Job* xviii. 9, 10. The whole creation, that groans under the burthen of man's sin, will at length sink and break under the weight, like this lattice. He is never safe that has God for his enemy.

3. In his distress he sends messengers to enquire of the god of Ekron, whether he should recover or no, *ver.* 2. And here, (1.) His enquiry was very foolish. *Shall I recover?* Even nature it self would rather have asked, What means may I use that I may recover? But as one solicitous only to know his fortune, not to know his duty, his question is only this, *Shall I recover?* which a little time would give answer to. We should be more thoughtful what will become of us after death, than how, or when, or where we shall die; and more desirous to be told how we may carry our selves well in our sickness, and get good to our souls by it, than whether we shall recover from it. (2.) His sending it to Baal-zebub was very wicked; to make a dead and dumb idol, perhaps newly erected; (for idolaters were fond of new gods) his oracle, was no less a reproach to his reason, than to his religion. Baal-zebub signifies the lord of a fly; one of their Baals that perhaps gave his answers either by the power of the demons, or the craft of the priests, with a humming noise, like that of a great fly; or that had (as they fancied) rid their country of the swarms of flies wherewith it was infested, or of some pestilential disease brought among them by flies. Perhaps, this dunghill deity was as famous then as the oracle of Delphos was long after in Greece. In the New Testament the prince of the devils is called Beel-zebub, *Matth.* xii. 24. for the gods of the Gentiles were devils, and this perhaps grew to be one of the most famous.

4. Elijah, by direction from God, meets the messengers, and turns them back with an answer that shall save them the labour of going to Ekron. Had Ahaziah sent for Elijah, humbled himself, and begged his prayers, he might have had an answer of peace; but if he send to the god of Ekron instead of the God of Israel, that, like Saul's consulting the witch, shall fill the measure of his iniquity, and bring upon him a sentence of death. They that will not enquire of the word of God for their comfort, shall be made to hear it whether they will or no to their amazement.

1. He faithfully reproves his sin, *ver.* 3. *Is it not because there is not* (i. e. because you think there is not) a God in Israel, (*because there is no God, none in Israel*, so it may be read) *that ye go to enquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron*, a despicable town of the Philistines, *Zech.* ix. 7. long since vanquished by Israel? Here, 1. The sin was bad enough, giving that honour to the devil which is due to God alone, which was done as much by their enquiries, as by their sacrifices. Note, It is a very wicked thing, upon any occasion or pretence whatsoever, to consult with the devil. This wickedness reigned in the heathen world, *Isa.* xlvii. 12, 13. and remains too much even in the christian world, and the devil's kingdom is supported by it. 2. The construction which Elijah in God's name puts upon it, makes it much worse: It is because you think not only that the God of Israel is not able to tell you, but that there is no God at all in Israel; else you would not send so far for a divine answer. Note, A practical and constructive atheism is the cause and malignity of our departures from God. Sure we think there is *no God in Israel* when we live at large, make flesh our arm, and seek a portion in the things of this world.

2. He plainly reads his doom; Go, tell him *he shall surely die*, *ver.* 4. Since he is so fond to know his fate, this is it, let him make the best of it. The certain fearful looking for of judgment and indignation which this message must needs cause, cannot but cut him to the heart.

5. The Message being delivered to him by his servants, he enquires of them by whom it was sent him, and concludes, by their description of him, that it must be Elijah, *ver.* 7, 8. For, (1.) His dress was the same that he had seen him in in his father's court. He was clad in a hairy garment, and a leather girdle about him, plain and homely in his garb. John Baptist herein resembled him, who was the Elias of the New Testament, for his clothes

were made of hair-cloth, and he was girt with a leathern girdle, *Matth.* iii. 4. He that was clothed with the Spirit, despised all rich and gay clothing. (2.) His message was such as he used to deliver to his father, to whom he never prophesied good, but evil. Elijah is one of those witnesses that still torments the inhabitants of the earth, *Rev.* xi. 10. He that was a thorn in Ahab's eyes, will be so in the eyes of his son, while he treads in the steps of his wickedness; and he is ready to cry out, as his father did, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* Let sinners consider that the word which took hold of their fathers is still as quick and powerful as ever. See *Zech.* i. 6. *Heb.* iv. 12.

9. Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty, with his fifty: and he went up to him (and behold, he sat on the top of an hill) and he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down. 10. And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. 11. Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty, with his fifty: and he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly. 12. And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. 13. ¶ And he sent again a captain of the third fifty, with his fifty: and the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, Oh man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants be precious in thy sight. 14. Behold, there came fire down from heaven, and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties, with their fifties: therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight. 15. And the angel of the LORD said unto Elijah, Go down with him, be not afraid of him. And he arose, and went down with him unto the king. 16. And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron (*is it not because there is no God in Israel to enquire of his word?*) therefore thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. 17. ¶ So he died, according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken: and Jehoram reigned in his stead, in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah; because he had no son. 18. Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

Here, 1. The king issues out a warrant for the apprehending of Elijah. If the god of Ekron had told him he should die, it is probable he would have taken it quietly, but now a prophet of the Lord tells him so, reproving him for his sin, and minding him of the God of Israel, he cannot bear it; so far is he from making any good improvement of the warning given him, that he is enraged against the prophet; neither his sickness nor the thoughts of death made any good impressions upon him, nor possessed him with any fear of God; no external alarms will startle and soften secure sinners, but rather exasperate them.—Did the king think Elijah a prophet, a true prophet, why then durst he persecute him? Did he think him a common person, what needed such a force be sent to seize him? Thus a band of men must take our Lord Jesus.

2. The captain that was sent with his fifty soldiers found Elijah on the top of a hill, (some think Carmel) and commanded him in the king's name to surrender himself, *ver.* 9. Elijah was now so far from absconding, as formerly, in the close recesses of a cave, that he makes a bold appearance on the top of a hill; experience of God's protection makes him more bold.—The captain calls him *a man of God*, not that he believed him to be so, or revered him as such a one, but because he was commonly called so; had he really looked upon him as a prophet, he would not have attempted to make him his prisoner, and had he thought him intrusted with the word of God, he would not have pretended to command him with the word of a king.

3. Elijah calls for fire from heaven to consume this haughty daring sinner, not to secure himself, he could have done that some other way; nor to revenge himself, for it was not his own cause that he appeared and acted in; but to prove his mission, and reveal the wrath of God from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. This captain had in scorn called him a man of God, if I be so, saith Elijah, thou shalt pay dear for making a jest of it; he valued himself upon his commission, the king

hath said so and so, but Elijah will let him know that the God of Israel is superior to the king of Israel, and has a greater power to enforce his commands. — It was not long since Elijah had fetched fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice, 1. *Kings* xviii. 38. in token of God's acceptance of that sacrifice as an atonement for the sins of the people, but they having slighted that, now the fire falls not on the sacrifice, but on the sinners themselves, *ver.* 10. — See here, 1. What an interest the prophets had in heaven, what the Spirit of God in them demanded; the power of God effected; Elijah did but speak, and it was done; he that formerly had fetched water from heaven, now fetches fire; O the power of prayer! *Concerning the work of my hands command ye me,* Isa. xlv. 11. — 2. What an interest heaven had in the prophets! God was always ready to plead their cause, and avenge the injuries done to them; kings shall still be rebuked for their sakes, and charged to do his prophets no harm; one Elijah is more to God, than ten thousand captains and their fifties; doubtless Elijah did this by a divine impulse, and yet our Saviour would not allow the disciples to draw it into a precedent, *Luke* ix. 54. They were now not far from the place where Elias did this act of justice upon provoking Israelites, and would needs in like manner call for fire upon those provoking Samaritans; no, faith Christ, by no means, *you know not what manner of spirit you are of,* 1. *e.* (1.) You do not consider what manner of spirit, as disciples, you are called to, and how different from that of the Old Testament dispensation; it was agreeable enough to that dispensation of terror, and of the letter, for Elias to call for fire; but the dispensation of the Spirit and of grace will by no means allow of it. (2.) You are not aware what manner of spirit you are upon this occasion acted by, and how different from that of Elias, he did it in holy zeal, you in passion, he was concerned for God's glory, you for your own reputation only; God judgeth mens practices by their principles, and his judgment is according to truth.

4. This is repeated a second time; would one think it? (1.) Ahaziah sends a second time to apprehend Elijah, *ver.* 11. as if he were resolved not to be baffled by omnipotence itself; obstinate sinners must be convinced and conquered at last by the fire of hell, for fire from heaven it seems will not do it. (2.) Another captain is ready with his fifty, who in his blind rage against the prophet, and his blind obedience to the king, dares engage in that service which had been fatal to the last undertakers; this is as impudent and imperious as the last, and more in haste, not only *come down quickly*, and do not struggle, but, without taking any notice of what had been done, he bids him *come down quickly*, and not trifle, the king's business requires haste; come down, or I will fetch thee down. (3.) Elijah relents not, but calls for another flash of lightning, which instantly lays this captain and his fifty dead upon the spot; they that will sin like others, must expect to suffer like them; God is inflexibly just.

5. The third captain humbled himself, and cast himself upon the mercy of God and Elijah; it doth not appear that Ahaziah ordered him to do so, his stubborn heart is as hard as ever, so regardless is he of the terrors of the Lord, so little affected with the manifestations of his wrath, and withal, so prodigal of the lives of his subjects, that he sent a third with the same provoking message to Elijah, but he took warning by the fate of his predecessors, who, perhaps, lay dead before his eyes, and instead of summoning the prophet down, fell down before him, and begged for his life, and the lives of his soldiers, acknowledging their own ill deserts, and the prophet's power, *ver.* 13, 14. *Let my life be precious in thy sight.* Note, There is nothing to be got by contending with God, if we would prevail with him, it must be by supplication; if we would not fall before God, we must bow before him; and those are wise for themselves who learn submission from the fatal consequences of others' obstinacy.

6. Elijah doth more than grant the request of this third captain, he *saves his life*; God is not so severe with those that stand it out against him, but he is as ready to shew mercy to those that repent and submit to him; never any found it in vain to cast themselves upon the mercy of God; nay, this captain shall have the honour of carrying his point; Elijah being so commanded by the angel, *goes down with him to the king*, *ver.* 15. Thus he shews, that he before refused to come, not because he feared the king or court, but because he would not be restored, nor lessen the honour of his master; he *magnifies his office*. — He comes boldly to the king, and tells him to his face (look how he will take it) what he had before sent to him, *ver.* 16. that he should surely and shortly die, he mitigates not the sentence, either for fear of the king's displeasure, or in pity to his misery, the God of Israel has condemned him, let him send to see whether the god of Ekron can deliver him. — So thunder-struck is Ahaziah with this message, when it comes from the prophet's own mouth, that neither he, nor any of those about him, dare offer him any violence, nor so much as give him an affront, but out of that den of lions he comes unhurt, like Daniel: Who can harm those whom God will shelter?

Lastly, The prediction is accomplished in a few days; Ahaziah died, *ver.* 17. and dying childless, left his kingdom to his brother Jehoram; his father reigned wickedly twenty two years, he not two; sometimes the *wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power*; but they, who therefore promise themselves prosperity in impiety, may perhaps find themselves deceived; for (as bishop Hall observes here) "Some sinners live long to aggravate their judgment, others die soon to hasten it;" but it is certain, *evil pursues sinners*, and sooner or later it will overtake them; nor will any thing fill the measure sooner than that complicated iniquity of Ahaziah, honouring the devil's oracles, and hating God's oracles.

C H A P. II.

In this chapter we have, (1.) The translation of Elijah, that famous story; in the close of the foregoing chapter, we had a wicked king leaving the world in disgrace, here we have a holy prophet leaving it in honour, the departure of the former was his greatest misery, of the latter his greatest bliss; men are as their end is. — Here is, 1. Elijah's taking leave of his friends, the sons of the prophets, and especially Elisha, who kept close to him, and walked with him through Jordan, *ver.* 1—10. 2. His rapture into heaven by the ministry of angels, *ver.* 11. and Elisha's lamentation of the loss this earth had of him, *ver.* 12. (2.) The manifestation of Elisha, as a prophet in his room. 1. By the dividing of Jordan, *ver.* 13, 14. 2. By the respects which the sons of the prophets paid him, *ver.* 15—18. 3. By the healing of the unwholesome waters of Jericho, *ver.* 19—22. 4. By the destruction of the children of Bethel that mocked him, *ver.* 23—25. This revolution in prophecy makes a greater figure than the revolution of a kingdom.

1. **A**ND it came to pass when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. 2. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee: for the LORD hath sent me to Beth-el. And Elisha said unto him, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Beth-el. 3. And the sons of the prophets that were at Beth-el, came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it, hold you your peace. 4. And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee: for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. 5. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho, came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he answered, Yea, I know it, hold you your peace. 6. And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here: for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on. 7. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. 8. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapt it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.

Elijah's times, and the events concerning him, are as little dated as of any great man in scripture; we are not told of his age, nor in what year of Ahab's reign he first appeared, nor in what year of Joram's he disappeared, and therefore cannot conjecture how long he flourished; it is supposed about twenty years in all.

Here we are told;

1. That God had determined to take him up into heaven by a whirlwind, *ver.* 1. he would do it, and, it is probable, let him know of his purpose some time before, that he must shortly leave the world, not by death, but be translated body and soul to heaven, as Enoch was, only undergoing such a change as would be necessary to the qualifying of him to be an inhabitant in that world of spirits, and such as they shall undergo, who will be found alive at Christ's coming; it is not for us to say, why God would put such a peculiar honour upon Elijah above any other of the prophets, he was a man *subject to like passions as we are*, knew sin, and yet never tasted death; wherefore is he thus dignified, thus distinguished, as a man whom the King of kings did delight to honour? We may suppose that herein, 1. God looked back upon his past services, which were eminent and extraordinary, and intended him a recompence for those, and an encouragement to the sons of the prophets to tread in the

the steps of his zeal and faithfulness, and whatever it cost them to witness against the corruptions of the age they lived in. — 2. He looked down upon the present, dark, and degenerate state of the church, and would thus give a very sensible proof of another life after this, and draw the hearts of the faithful few upwards towards himself, and that other life. — 3. He looked forward to the evangelical dispensation, and in the translation of Elijah, gave a type and figure of the ascension of Christ, and the *opening of the kingdom of heaven to all believers*; Elijah had by faith and prayer conversed much with heaven, and now he is taken thither, to assure us that if we have our conversation in heaven while we are here on earth, we shall be there shortly, the soul shall, and that is the man, happy there; there for ever.

2. That Elisha had determined, as long as he continued on earth, to cleave to him, and not to leave him; Elijah seemed desirous to shake him off, would have him stay behind at Gilgal, at Bethel, at Jericho, *ver. 2, 4, 6*. Some think out of humility he knew what glory God designed him, but would not seem to glory in it, nor desired it should be seen of men; God's favourites covet not to have it proclaimed before them, that they are so, as the favourites of earthly princes do; or rather, it was to try him, and make his constant adherence to him the more commendable, like Naomi's persuading Ruth to go back; in vain doth Elijah intreat him to tarry here, and tarry there, he resolves to tarry no where behind his master, till he goes to heaven, and leaves him behind on this earth; whatever comes of it, *I will not leave thee*; and why so? Not only because he loved him, but, 1. Because he desired to be edified by his holy heavenly converse as long as he stayed on earth, which had always been profitable, but we may suppose now more so than ever; we should therefore do all the spiritual good we can one to another, and get all we can one by another while we are together, because we are to be *together but a while*. — 2. Because he desired to be satisfied concerning his departure, and to see him when he was taken up, that his faith might be confirmed, and his acquaintance with the invisible world increased. — He had long followed Elijah, and he would not leave him now when he hoped for the parting blessing; let not those that follow Christ, come short, by tiring at last.

3. That Elijah, before his departure, visited the schools of the prophets, and took leave of them; it seems, there were such schools in many of the cities of Israel, probably even in Samaria itself; here we find *sons of the prophets*, and considerable numbers of them, even at Bethel, where one of the calves was set up, and at Jericho, which was lately built in defiance of a divine curse; at Jerusalem, and in the kingdom of Judah they had priests and Levites, and the temple-service, the want of which in the kingdom of Israel God graciously made up by those colleges, where men were trained up and employed in the exercises of religion and devotion, and whither good people resorted to solemnize the appointed feasts with praying and hearing, when they had not conveniences for sacrifice or incense, and thus religion was kept up in a time of general apostasy; much of God was among these prophets, and *more were the children of the desolate, than the children of the married wife*; none of all the high priests were comparable to those two great men Elijah and Elisha, who, for ought we know, never attended in the temple at Jerusalem. — These seminaries of religion and virtue, which Elijah, it is probable, had been instrumental to found, he now visits before his departure, to instruct, encourage, and bless them. Note, Those that are going to heaven themselves, ought to be concerned for those they leave behind them on earth, and to leave with them their experiences, testimonies, counsels and prayers, *2 Pet. i. 15*. When Christ said with triumph, *Now I am no more in the world*, he added with tenderness, *but these are; Father, keep them*.

4. That the sons of the prophets had intelligence, either from Elijah himself, or by the spirit of prophecy in some of their own society, or suspected it by the solemnity of Elijah's farewell, that he was now shortly to be removed; and, 1. They told Elisha of it, both at Bethel, *ver. 3*. and at Jericho, *ver. 5*. *Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day?* This they said, not as upbraiding him with his loss, or expecting that when his master was gone, he would be upon the level with them, but to shew how full they were of the thoughts of this matter, and big with expectation of the event, and to admonish Elisha to prepare for the loss; know we not that our nearest relations, and dearest friends, must shortly be taken from us? *The Lord will take them*, we lose them not till he calls for them, whose they are, and who *taketh away and none can hinder him*; he takes away superiors from our head, inferiors from our feet, equals out of our arms; let us therefore carefully do the duty of every relation, which we may reflect upon with comfort when it comes to be dissolved. — Elisha knew it too well, and *sorrow had filled his heart* upon this account, (as it did the disciples in a like case, *John xvi. 6*.) and therefore he did not need to be told of it, did not care for hearing of it, and would not be interrupted in his contemplations on this great concern, or in the least diverted from his attendance upon his mas-

ter, *I know it, hold you your peace*; he speaks not this peevishly, or in contempt of the sons of the prophets, but as one that was himself, and would have them composed and sedate, and with an awful silence expecting the event, *I know it, be silent*, *Zech. ii. 13*. — 2. They went themselves to be witnesses of it at a distance, though they might not closely attend, *ver. 7*. *Fifty of them stood to view afar off*, intending to satisfy their own curiosity, but God so ordered it, that they might be eye-witnesses of the honour heaven did to that prophet, who was *despised and rejected of men*; God's works are well worthy our notice; when a door is opened in heaven, the call is, *Come up hither, come and see*.

5. That the miraculous dividing of the river Jordan, was the preface to Elijah's translation into the heavenly Canaan, as it had been to the entrance of Israel into the earthly Canaan, *ver. 8*. He must go on the other side Jordan to be translated, because it was his native country, and that he might be near the place where Moses died, and that thus honour might be put on that part of the country which was most despised. — He and Elisha might have gone over Jordan by a ferry, as other passengers did, but God would magnify Elijah in his exit, as he did Joshua in his entrance, by the dividing of this river, *Josh. iii. 7*. — As Moses with his rod divided the sea, so Elijah with his mantle divided Jordan, both the *insignia* of their office; these waters of old yielded to the ark, now to the prophets mantle, which, to those that wanted the ark, was an equivalent token of God's presence. — When God will take up his faithful ones to heaven, death is the Jordan which immediately before their translation they must pass through, and they find a way through it, a safe and comfortable way; the death of Christ has divided those waters, that the ransomed of the Lord may pass over; *O death where is thy sting, thy hurt, thy terror?*

9. ¶ And it came to pass when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. 10. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: *nevertheless*, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. 11. And it came to pass as they still went on and talked, that behold, *there appeared* a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. 12. ¶ And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof! And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.

Here, 1. Elijah makes his will, and leaves Elisha his heir, now anointing him to be prophet in his room, more than when he *cast his mantle upon him*, *1 Kings xix. 19*.

(1.) Elijah, being greatly pleased with the constancy of Elisha's affection and attendance, bid him ask what he should do for him, what blessing he should leave him at parting; he doth not say, (as bishop Hall well observes) *Ask of me when I am gone*, in heaven I shall be better able to befriend thee, but ask before I go; our friends on earth may be spoken to, and can give us an answer, but we know not that we can have access to any friend in heaven but Christ; and God in him; *Abraham is ignorant of us*. (2.) Elisha, having this fair opportunity to enrich himself with the best riches, prays for a *double portion of his spirit*; he asks not for wealth or honour, or exemption from trouble, but to be qualified for the service of God and his generation; he asks, 1. For the Spirit, not that the gifts and graces of the Spirit were in Elijah's power to give, therefore he saith not, Give me the Spirit, he knew very well it is God's gift, but *let it be upon me*, intercede with God for this for me; Christ bid his disciples ask what they would, not one, but all, and promised to send the Spirit with much more authority and assurance than Elijah could. 2. For his spirit; because he was to be prophet in his room, to carry on his work; to father the sons of the prophets, and face their enemies, because he had the same difficulties to encounter, and the same perverse generation to deal with that he had, so that if he have not his spirit, he hath not *strength according to the day*. — 3. For a *double portion of his spirit*, he doth not mean double to what he had, but double to what the rest of the prophets had, from whom so much would not be expected as from Elisha, who had been brought up under Elijah; it is a holy ambition to *covet earnestly the best gifts*, and those which will render us most serviceable to God and our brethren. Note, We all ought, both ministers and people; to set before us the examples of our predecessors, to labour after their spirit, and to be earnest with God for that grace which carried them through their work, and enabled them to finish well. (3.) Elijah promiseth him that which he asked, but under two provisos, *ver. 10*. 1. Provided he put a due value upon it, and esteem it highly, this he teaches him to do by calling it a hard thing, not too

too hard for God to do, but too great for him to expect; those are best prepared for spiritual blessings that are most sensible of their worth, and their own unworthiness to receive them. 2. Provided he kept close to his master, even to the last, and was observant of him; *if thou see me when I am taken from thee it shall be so*, otherwise not; a diligent attendance upon his master's instructions, and a careful observance of his example, particularly now in his last scene, was the condition, and would be a proper means of obtaining much of his spirit; taking strict notice of the manner of his ascension would likewise be of great use to him; the comforts of departing saints and their experiences, will mightily help both to gild our comforts and to steel our resolutions; or perhaps this was intended only as a sign, if God favour thee so far as to give thee a sight of me when I ascend, take that for a token that he will do this for thee, and depend upon it; Christ's disciples saw him ascend, and were thereupon assured they should in a little time be filled with his Spirit, *Acts i. 8.*—Elisha, we may suppose, hereupon prayed earnestly, *Lord, shew me this token for good.*

2. Elijah is carried up to heaven in a fiery chariot, *ver. 11.* like Enoch he was translated, *that he should not see death*, and was, (as Mr. Cowly expresseth it) *the second man that leaped the ditch where all the rest of mankind fell, and went not downward to the sky*; many curious questions might be asked about this matter, which could not be answered, let it suffice that we are here told, (1.) What his Lord when he came found him doing, he was talking with Elisha, instructing and encouraging him, directing him in his work, and quickning him to it, for the good of those whom he left behind, he was not meditating or praying, as one wholly taken up with the world he was going to, but engaged in edifying discourse, as one concerned about the kingdom of God among men; we mistake if we think our preparation for heaven is carried on only by contemplation and the acts of devotion, usefulness to others will pass as well in our account as any thing; thinking of divine things is good, but talking of them, (if it come from the heart) is better, because for edification, *1 Cor. xiv. 4.* Christ ascended as he was blessing his disciples. (2.) What convey his Lord sent for him, *a chariot of fire and horses of fire*, which appeared either descending upon them from the clouds, or (as bishop Patrick thinks) running towards them upon the ground, in this form the angels appeared; the souls of all the faithful are carried by an invisible guard of angels into the bosom of Abraham, but Elijah being to carry his body with him, this heavenly guard appeared visibly, not in a human shape, as usual, though so they might have born him up in their arms, or carried him as on eagles wings, but that had been to carry him like a child, like a lamb, (*Isa. xl. 11, 31.*) they appear in the form of a chariot and horses, that he may ride in state, may ride in triumph, like a prince, like a conqueror, yea, *more than a conqueror*; the angels are called in scripture Cherubim and Seraphim, and their appearance here, though it may seem below their dignity, answers to both those names; for, 1. Seraphim signifies fiery, and God is said to make them a flame of fire, *Psal. civ. 4.* 2. Cherubim, (as many think) signifies chariots, and they are called *the chariots of God*, *Psal. lxxviii. 17.* and he is said to *ride upon a cherub*, *Psal. xviii. 10.* to which perhaps there is an allusion in Ezekiel's vision of four living creatures, and wheels, like horses and chariots; in Zechariah's vision they are so represented, *Zech. i. 8. vi. 1.* compare *Rev. vi. 2. 5.* See the readiness of the angels to do the will of God, even in the meanest services, for the good of them that shall be heirs of salvation; Elijah must remove to the world of angels, and therefore to shew how desirous they were of his company, some of them would come to fetch him; the chariot and horses appeared like fire, not for burning but brightness, not to torture or consume him, but to render his ascension conspicuous and illustrious in the eyes of those that stood afar off to view it; Elijah had burned with holy zeal for God and his honour, and now with a heavenly fire he was refined and translated.

3. How he was separated from Elisha, this chariot parted them both asunder. Note, The dearest friends must part; Elisha had protested he would not leave him, yet now is left behind by him.

4. Whither he was carried, he *went up by a whirlwind into heaven*; the fire tends upward, the whirlwind helped to carry him through the atmosphere, out of the reach of the magnetick virtue of this earth, and then how swiftly he ascended through the pure æther to the world of holy and blessed spirits we cannot conceive.

“ But where he stopt will ne’er be known,
“ Till phoenix nature, aged grown,
“ To a better being shall aspire,
“ Mourning herself, like him, to eternity in fire. COWLY.

Elijah had once in a passion wished he might die, yet God was so gracious to him as not only not to take him at his word then, but to honour him with this singular privilege that he should never see death; and by this instance and that of Enoch, 1. God shewed how men should have left the world if they had not sinned,

not by death, but by a translation. 2. He gave a glimpse of that life and immortality which are brought to light by the gospel, of the glory reserved for the bodies of the saints, and the opening of the kingdom of heaven to all believers, as then to Elijah; it was also a figure of Christ's ascension.

3. Elisha pathetically laments the loss of that great prophet; but attends him with an encomium, *ver. 12.* (1.) He saw it; thus he received the sign by which he was assured of the grant of his request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit; he looked steadfastly towards heaven, whence he was to expect that gift, as the disciples did, *Acts i. 10.*—He saw it a while, but the vision was presently out of his sight, he saw him no more. (2.) He rent his own clothes, in token of the sense he had of his own and the publick loss; though Elijah was gone triumphantly to heaven, yet this world could ill spare him, and therefore his removal ought to be much regretted by the survivors; sure their hearts are hard, whose eyes are dry, when God, by taking away faithful useful men, calls for weeping and mourning; though Elijah's departure made way for Elisha's eminency, especially since he was now sure of a double portion of his spirit, yet he lamented the loss of him, for he loved him, and could have served him for ever. (3.) He gave him a very honourable character, as the reason why he thus lamented the loss of him. 1. He himself had lost the guide of his youth; my father, my father; he saw his own condition like that of a fatherless child, thrown upon the world, and laments it accordingly; Christ when he left his disciples did not leave them orphans, *John xiv. 15.* but Elijah must. 2. The publick had lost the best of its guard, he was *the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.*—He would have brought them all to heaven as in this chariot, if it had not been their own fault; they used not chariots and horses in the wars, but Elijah was to them by his counsels, reproofs and prayers, better than the strongest force of chariot and horse, and kept off the judgments of God; his departure was like the routing of an army, an irreparable loss. — Better have lost all our men of war than this man of God.

13. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; 14. And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, *Where is the LORD God of Elijah?* and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. 15. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho, saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him: 16. ¶ And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men, let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the spirit of the LORD hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send. 17. And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not. 18. And when they came again to him (for he tarried at Jericho) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?

We have here an account of what followed immediately after the rapture of Elijah.

1. The tokens of God's presence with Elisha, and the marks of his elevation into Elijah's room, to be, as he had been, a father to the sons of the prophets, and the chariots and horsemen of Israel.

(1.) He was possessed of Elijah's mantle, the badge of his office, which, we may suppose, he put on and wore for his master's sake, *ver. 13.* When Elijah went to heaven, though he did not let fall his body as others do, he let fall his mantle instead of it, for he was unclothed, that he might be clothed upon with immortality; he was going to a world where he needed not the mantle either to adorn him or to shelter him from weather, or to wrap his face in, as *1 Kings xix. 13.*—He left his mantle as a legacy to Elisha, and though in it self it was of small value, yet as it was a token of the descent of the Spirit upon him, it was more than if he had bequeathed to him thousands of gold and silver.—Elisha took it up, not as a sacred relique to be worshipped, but a significant garment to be worn, and a recompence to him for his own garments which he had rent; he loved this cloke ever since it was first cast over him, *1 Kings xix. 19.* He that then so cheerfully obeyed the summons of it, and became Elijah's servant, is now dignified with it, and becomes his successor; there are remains of great and good men which, like this mantle, ought to be gathered up and preserved by the survivors; their sayings, their writings, their examples, that as their works follow them in the reward of them, they may stay behind in the benefit of them.

2. He was possessed of Elijah's power to divide Jordan, *ver.* 14. Having parted with his father he returns to his sons in the schools of the prophets; Jordan was between him and them, it had been divided to make way for Elijah to his glory, he will try whether it will divide to make way for him to his business, and by that he will know that God is with him, and that he has the double portion of Elijah's spirit; Elijah's last miracle shall be Elisha's first, thus he begins where he left off, and there is no vacancy.—In dividing the waters, (1.) He made use of Elijah's mantle, as Elijah himself had done, *ver.* 8. to signify that he designed no other but to keep to his master's methods, and would not introduce any thing new, as those affect to do that think themselves wiser than their predecessors.—(2.) He applied himself to Elijah's God, *Where is the Lord God of Elijah?* He doth not ask where is Elijah? Either as poring upon the loss of him, as if he could not be easy now he was gone, or as doubting of his happy state, as if, like the sons of the prophets here, he wot not what was become of him, or as curiously enquiring concerning him, and the particulars of that state he was removed to; no, that is a hidden life, it doth not yet appear what we shall be: nor as expecting help from him, no, Elijah is happy, but is neither omniscient nor omnipotent; but he asks *where is the Lord God of Elijah?* Now Elijah was taken to heaven, God had abundantly proved himself the God of Elijah; if he had not prepared for him that city, and done better for him there than ever he did for him in this world, he *would have been ashamed to be called his God*, Heb. xi. 16. Matt. xxvii. 31, 32.—Now Elijah was taken to heaven, Elisha enquired, 1. After God; when our creature comforts are removed, we have a God to go to, that lives for ever. 2. After *the God of Elijah*, the God that Elijah served, and honoured, and pleaded for, and adhered to, when all Israel had deserted him; this honour is done to those who cleave to God in times of general apostasy, that God will be in a peculiar manner their God; the God that owned, and protected, and provided for Elijah, and many ways honoured him, especially now at last; where is he? Lord, am not I promised Elijah's spirit? Make good that promise; the words which next follow in the original *Aph-bis*, even he, which we join to the following clause, when he also had smitten the waters; some make an answer to this question, *Where is Elijah's God? Etiam ille adhuc superest*, he is in being still, and nigh at hand; we have lost Elijah, but we have not lost Elijah's God, he *has not forsaken the earth*, it is even he that is still with me. Note, 1. It is the duty and interest of the saints on earth to enquire after God, and apply themselves to him as the Lord God of the saints that are gone before to heaven, *the God of our fathers*. 2. It is very comfortable to those who enquire after God that they know where to find him, it is *even he that is in his holy temple*, Psal. xi. 3, 4. and *nigh to all that call upon him*, Psal. cxlv. 18.—3. Those that walk in the spirit and steps of their godly faithful predecessors, shall certainly experience the same grace that they experienced, Elijah's God will be Elisha's too, the Lord God of the holy prophets is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever; and what will it avail us to have the mantles of those that are gone, their places, their books, if we have not their spirit, their God?

3. He was possessed of Elijah's interest in the sons of the prophets, *ver.* 15. Some of the fellows of the college at Jericho, who had placed themselves conveniently near Jordan to see what passed, were surprised to see Jordan divided before Elisha in his return, and took that as a convincing evidence that *the spirit of Elijah did rest upon him*, and that therefore they ought to pay the same respect and deference to him that they had done to Elijah; accordingly they went to meet him, to congratulate his safe passage through fire and water, and the honour God had put upon him, and they *bowed themselves to the ground before him*; they were trained up in the schools, Elijah was taken from the plough, yet when they perceive that God is with him, and that this is *the man whom he delights to honour*, they readily submit to him, as their head and father, as the people to Joshua when Moses was dead, *Josh.* i. 17. Those that appear to have God's Spirit and presence with them, ought to have our esteem and best affections, notwithstanding the meanness of their extraction and education. Whomever God honours, we must.—This ready submission of the sons of the prophets, no doubt, was a great encouragement to Elisha, and helped to clear his call.

2. The needless search which the sons of the prophets made for Elijah. (1.) They suggested it possible that he was dropt, either alive or dead, upon some mountain, or in some valley; and it would be a satisfaction to them if they sent some lusty men, whom they had at command, in quest of him, *ver.* 17. Some of them perhaps started this as a demurrer to the choice of Elisha: Let them first be sure that Elijah was quite gone. Could they think Elijah thus neglected by heaven, that chosen vessel thus cast away as a vessel in which was no pleasure? (2.) Elisha consented not to their motion, till they overcame him with importunity, *ver.* 17. They urged him till he was ashamed to oppose it any farther, lest he should be thought wanting in his respect to his old master, or loth to resign the mantle again. Wise men may yield to that for their quietness and credit sake, which yet their judgment is against, as needless and fruitless. (3.) The

issue made them as much ashamed of their proposal, as they by their importunity had made Elisha ashamed of his opposing it. Their messengers, after they had tired themselves with fruitless search, returned with a *non est inventus*, and gave Elisha an opportunity of upbraiding his friends with their folly, *Did I not say unto you, Go not?* *ver.* 18. which would make them the more willing to acquiesce in his judgment another time. Traversing hills and valleys will never bring us to Elijah, but the imitation of his holy faith and zeal will in due time.

19. ¶ And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is nought, and the ground barren. 20. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. 21. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death, or barren land. 22. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake. 23. ¶ And he went up from thence unto Beth-el: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald-head, go up, thou bald-head. 24. And he turned back and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD: and there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them. 25. And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.

Elisha had in this respect a double portion of Elijah's spirit, that he wrought more miracles than he did; Some reckon them in number just double. Two are recorded in these verses. A miracle of mercy to Jericho; and a miracle of judgment to Beth-el, *Psal.* ci. 1.

1. Here is a blessing upon the waters of Jericho, which was effectual to heal them. Jericho was built in disobedience to a command, and in defiance to a threatening, and at the expence of the lives of all the builder's children; yet when it was built, it was not ordered to be demolished again, nor were God's prophets or people forbidden to dwell in it, but even within those walls that were built by iniquity, we find a nursery of piety. Fools, they say, build houses for wise men to dwell in: Here the wealth of the sinner provided a habitation for the just. We find Christ at Jericho, *Luke* xix. 1. Hither Elisha came to confirm the souls of the disciples with a more particular account of Elijah's translation than their spies could give them, who saw it at a distance. Here he staid while the fifty men were searching for him. And, 1. The men of Jericho represented to him their grievance, *ver.* 19. God's faithful prophets love to be employed; it is wisdom to make use of them in the little while that their light is with us.—They had not applied themselves to Elijah concerning the matter, perhaps because he was not so easy of access as Elisha was; but now we may hope by the influence of the divinity school in their city, they were reformed. The situation was pleasant, and afforded a good prospect; but they had neither wholesom water to drink, nor fruitful soil to yield them food, and what pleasure could they take then in their prospect? Water is a common mercy, which we should estimate by the greatness of the calamity which the want or unwholesomeness of it would be. Some think it was not all the ground about Jericho that was barren, and had bad water, but some one part only, and that where the sons of the prophets had their lodgings, who are here called the men of the city.

2. He soon redressed their grievance. Prophets should endeavour to make every place they come to some way or other the better for them, endeavouring to sweeten bitter spirits, and to make barren souls fruitful, by the due application of the word of God. Elisha will heal their waters; but, (1.) They must furnish him with salt in a new cruse, *ver.* 20. If salt had been proper to season the water, yet what could so small a quantity do towards it, and what the better for being in a new cruse? But thus they that would be helped must be employed, and their faith and obedience tried. God's works of grace are wrought not by any operations of ours, but in our observance of his institutions. (2.) He cast the salt *into the spring of the waters*, and so healed the streams, and the ground they watered. Thus the way to reform men's lives, is to renew their hearts; let those be seasoned with the salt of grace, for *out of them are the issues of life*. Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good. Purify the heart, and that will cleanse the hands. (3.) He did not pretend to do this by his own power, but in God's name: *Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters*. He is but the instrument, the channel through whom God is pleased to convey this healing virtue. By doing them this kindness with a *thus saith the Lord*, they would be made the more willing hereafter to receive from him a reproof, admonition, or command, with the same preface.

If in God's name he can help them, in God's name let him teach and rule them. *Thus saith the Lord*, out of Elisha's mouth, must ever after be of mighty force with them. (4.) The cure was lasting, and not for the present only, *The waters were healed unto this day*, ver. 22. What God doth, *it shall be for ever*, Eccles. iii. 14. When he by his Spirit *heals a soul*, there shall be *no more death nor barrenness*; the property is altered; what was useless and offensive, becomes grateful and serviceable.

2. Here is a curse upon the *children of Bethel*, which was effectual to destroy them; for it was not a curse causeless. At Bethel there was another school of prophets, thither Elisha goes next in this his primary visitation, and the scholars there, no doubt, welcomed him with all possible respect: But the townsmen were abusive to him. One of Jeroboam's calves was at Bethel; this they were proud of, and fond of, and hated them that reproved them. The law did not empower them to suppress this pious academy, but we may suppose it was their usual practice to jeer the prophets as they went along the streets, call them by some nick name or other, that they might expose them to contempt, prejudice their youth against them, and, if possible, drive them out of their town. Had the abuse done to Elisha, been the first offence of that kind, it is probable it would not have been so severely punished. But *mocking the messengers of the Lord*, and *misusing the prophets*, was one of the crying sins of Israel, as we find, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16. Now here we have,

1. An instance of that sin. The little *children of Bethel*, (the boys and girls that were playing in the streets) notice, it is likely, being come to the town of his approach, went out to meet him, not with their hosanna's, as they ought to have done, but with their scoffs, they gathered about him, and mocked him, as if he had been a fool, or one fit to make sport with; among other things that they used to jeer the prophets with, they had this particular taunt for him, *Go up, thou bald-head, Go up, thou bald-head*. It is a wicked thing to reproach any for their natural infirmities, or deformities; it is adding affliction to the afflicted, and if they are as God made them, the reproach reflects upon him. But this was such a thing as scarce deserved to be called a blemish, and should never have been turned to his reproach, if they had had any thing else to twit him with. It was his character, as a prophet, that they designed to abuse. The honour God had crowned him with, should have been sufficient to cover his bald head, and protect it from their scoffs. — They bid him *go up*, perhaps reflecting on the assumption of Elijah: Thy master, they say, is gone up, why dost not thou go up after him? Where is the fiery chariot? When shall we be rid of thee too? These children said as they were taught; had learned of their idolatrous parents to call foul names, and give ill language, especially to prophets. These young cocks (as we say) crowed after the old ones. Perhaps, their parents did at the same time send them out, and set them on, that, if possible, they might keep the prophet out of their town.

2. A specimen of that ruin which came upon Israel at last for misusing God's prophets, and of which this was intended to give them fair warning. Elisha heard their taunts a good while with patience; but at length the fire of holy zeal for God was kindled in his breast by the continued provocation, and he *turned and looked upon them*, to try if a grave and severe look would put them out of countenance, and oblige them to retire; to see if he could discern in their faces any marks of ingenuity: But they *were not ashamed, neither could they blush*; and therefore he *curst them in the name of the Lord*, both imprecated and denounced the following judgment, not in personal revenge for the indignity done to himself, but as the mouth of divine justice to punish the dishonour done to God. His summons was immediately obeyed; two she-bears (bears perhaps robbed of their whelps) came out of an adjacent wood, and presently killed forty two children, ver. 24. Now in this, (1.) The prophet must be justified, for he did it by divine impulse. Had the curse come from any ill principle, God would not have said Amen to it. We may think it had been better to have called for two rods for the correction of these children, than two bears for the destruction of them. But Elisha knew by the Spirit the ill character of these children, what a generation of vipers they were, and what mischievous enemies they would be to God's prophets, if they should live to be men, who begun so early to be abusive to them. He intended hereby to punish the parents, and to make them afraid of God's judgments. (2.) God must be glorified, as a righteous God that hates sin, and will reckon for it, even in little children. Let the hideous shrieks and groans of this wicked wretched brood make our flesh *tremble for fear of God*. Let little children be afraid of speaking naughty words, for God takes notice what they say. Let them not mock at any for their defects in mind and body, but pity them rather; especially let them know, it is at their peril if they jeer God's people or ministers, and scoff at any for well-doing. Let parents that would have comfort in their children, train them up well, and do their utmost betimes, to drive out the foolishness that is bound up in their hearts; for (as bishop Hall saith) "In vain do we look for good of those children whose education we

" have neglected; and in vain do we grieve for those miscarriages which our care might have prevented.

Elisha comes to Bethel, and fears not the revenges of the bereaved parents; God that bid him do what he did, he knew would bear him out. Thence he goes to mount Carmel, ver. 25. where, it is probable, there was a religious house, fit for retirement and contemplation a while. Thence he returned to Samaria, where, being a publick place, this father of the prophets might be most serviceable. Bishop Hall observes here, "That he can never be a profitable seer, who is either always or never alone.

CHAP. III.

We are now called to attend the publick affairs of Israel, in which we shall find Elisha concerned. Here is, 1. The general character of Jehoram king of Israel, ver. 1—3. 2. A war with Moab, in which Jehoram and his allies were engaged, ver. 4—8. 3. The straits which the confederate army was reduced to in their expedition against Moab, and their consulting of Elisha in that distress, with the answer of peace he gave them, ver. 9—19. 4. The glorious issue of this campaign, ver. 20—25. and the barbarous method the king of Moab took to oblige the confederate army to retire, ver. 26, 27. The house of Ahab is doomed to destruction; and though in this chapter we have both its character and its condition better than before, yet the threatened ruin is not far off.

1. **N**OW Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria, the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years. 2. And he wrought evil in the sight of the LORD, but not like his father, and like his mother; for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made. 3. Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom. 4. ¶ And Mesha king of Moab was a sheep-master, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams with the wool. 5. But it came to pass when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.

Jehoram the son of Ahab and brother of Ahaziah, is here upon the throne of Israel; and though he was but a bad man, yet two things are here recorded of him.

1. That he removed his father's idols. He did evil in many things, but not like his father Ahab, or his mother Jezebel, ver. 2. bad he was, but not so bad, so overmuch wicked, as Solomon speaks, Eccles. vii. 17. Perhaps Jehoshaphat, though by his alliance with the house of Ahab, he made his own family worse, yet he did something towards making Ahab's better. Jehoram saw his father and brother cut off for worshipping Baal, and wisely took warning by God's judgments on them, and *put away the image of Baal*, resolving to worship the God of Israel only, and consult none but his prophets. So far was well, yet it did not prevent the destruction of Ahab's family; nay, that destruction came *in his days*, and fell immediately *upon him*, chap. ix. 24. though he was one of the best of the family, for then the measure of its iniquity was full. Jehoram's reformation was next to none: For, 1. He only put away the image of Baal *which his father had made*, in compliment to Jehoshaphat, who otherwise would not have come into confederacy with him, no more than with his brother, 1 Kings xxii. 48. But he did not destroy the worship of Baal among the people, for Jehu found it prevalent, chap. x. 19. It was well to reform his family, but it was not enough, he ought to have used his power for the reforming of his kingdom. 2. When he put away the image of Baal, he stuck to the worship of the calves, that politick sin of Jeroboam, ver. 3. *He departed not therefrom*, because that was the state engine by which the division between the two tribes was supported. Those do not truly nor acceptably repent or reform, who only part with the sins that they lose by, but continue their affection to the sins that they get by. 3. He only put away the image of Baal, he did not break it in pieces, as he ought to have done. He laid it aside for the present, yet not knowing but he might have occasion for it another time; and Jezebel, for reasons of state, was content to worship her Baal in private.

2. That he did what he could to recover his brother's losses. As he had something more of the religion of an Israelite than his father, so he had something more of the spirit of a king than his brother. Moab rebelled against Israel immediately upon the death of his brother, chap. i. 1. And we do not find that Ahaziah made any attempt to chastise or reduce them, but tamely let go his interest in them, rather than entertain the cares, undergo the fatigues, and run the hazards of a war with them. His folly and pusillanimity herein, and his indifferency to the publick good were the more aggravated, because the tribute

bute which the king of Moab paid, was a very considerable branch of the revenue of the crown of Israel. *An hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand weathers*, ver. 4. The riches of kings then lay more in cattle than coin, and they thought it not below them to *know the state of their flocks and herds* themselves, because, as Solomon observes, *the crown doth not endure to every generation*, Prov. xxvii. 23, 24. Taxes were then paid, not so much in money, as in the commodities of the country, which was an ease to the subject, whether it were an advantage to the prince or no.—The revolt of Moab was a great loss to Israel, yet Ahaziah sat still in sloth and ease: But an upper chamber in his house proved as fatal to him, as the high places of the field could have been, chap. i. 2. and the breaking of his lattices, let into his throne a man of a more active genius, that will not lose the dominion of Moab, but he will have one push for it.

6. ¶ And king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time, and numbred all Israel. 7. And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab hath rebelled against me: wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle? And he said, I will go up: *I am as thou art*, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses. 8. And he said, Which way shall we go up? And he answered, The way through the wilderness of Edom. 9. So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them. 10. And the king of Israel said, Alas, that the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab. 11. But Jehoshaphat said, *Is there not here a prophet of the LORD*, that we may enquire of the LORD by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah. 12. And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the LORD is with him. So the king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom went down to him. 13. And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab. 14. And Elisha said, *As the LORD of hosts liveth*, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee. 15. But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him. 16. And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches. 17. For thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water; that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts. 18. And this is *but* a light thing in the sight of the LORD: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand. 19. And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones.

Jehoram has no sooner got the scepter into his hand, but he takes the sword into his hand to reduce Moab. Crowns bring such cares and perils to the heads that wear them; no sooner in honour but in war. Now here we have,

1. The concerting of this expedition between Jehoram king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat king of Judah. Jehoram levied an army, ver. 6. and such an opinion he had of the godly king of Judah, that, (1.) He courted him to be his confederate: *Wilt thou go with me against Moab?* and gained him. Jehoshaphat said, *I will go up, I am as thou art*, ver. 7. Judah and Israel, though unhappily divided from each other, yet can unite against Moab a common enemy. Jehoshaphat upbraids them not with their revolt from the house of David, nor makes it an article of their alliance, that they should return to the allegiance, though he had good reason to insist upon it, but treats with Israel as a sister kingdom. Those are no friends to their own peace and strength, who can never find in their hearts to forgive and forget an old injury, and unite with those that have formerly broke in upon their rights. *Quod initio non valuit, tractu temporis invalescit*. (2.) He consulted him as his confident, ver. 8. He took advice of Jehoshaphat, who had more wisdom and experience than himself, which way they should make their

descent upon the country of Moab; and he advised that they should not march against them the next way over Jordan, but go round *through the wilderness of Edom*, that they might take the king of Edom (who was tributary to him) and his forces along with them; if two be better than one, much more will not a *threefold cord be easily broken*. Jehoshaphat had like to have paid dear for his joining with Ahab, yet he joins with his son, and this expedition also had like to have been fatal to him. There is nothing got by being yoked with unbelievers.

2. The great straits that the army of the confederates was reduced to in this expedition. Before they saw the face of an enemy, they were all in danger of perishing for want of water, ver. 9. This ought to have been considered before they ventured a march through the wilderness, the same wilderness where their ancestors wanted water, or very near it, *Numb. xx. 2*. God suffers his people, by their own improvidence, to bring themselves into distress, that the wisdom, power, and goodness of his providence may be glorified in their relief. What more cheap and common than water? It is *drink to every beast of the field*, Psal. civ. 11. yet the want of it will soon humble and ruin kings and armies.—The king of Israel sadly laments the present distress, and the imminent danger it put them in of falling into the hands of their enemies the Moabites, to whom, when weakened by thirst, they would be an easy prey, ver. 10. It was he that had *called these kings together*, yet he charges it upon providence, and reflects upon that as unkind, the Lord has *called them together*.—Thus *the foolishness of man perverteth his way*, and then *his heart fretteth against the Lord*, Prov. xix. 3.

3. Jehoshaphat's good motion to ask counsel of God in this exigence, ver. 11. The place they were now in, could not but mind them of the *wonders which their fathers told them of*, the waters fetched out of the rock for Israel's seasonable supply. The thought of this, we may suppose, encouraged Jehoshaphat to ask, *Is there not here a prophet of the Lord* like unto Moses? He was the more concerned, because it was by his advice that they fetched this compass through the wilderness, ver. 8. It was well that Jehoshaphat enquired of the Lord now, but it had been much better if he had done it sooner, before he engaged in this war, or steered this course; so the distress might have been prevented. Good men are sometimes remiss and forgetful, and neglect their duty, till necessity and affliction drives them to it.

4. Elisha recommended as a proper person for them to consult with, ver. 11. And here we may wonder, 1. That Elisha should follow the camp, especially in such a tedious march as this, as a volunteer, unasked, unobserved, and in no post of honour at all; not in the office of *priest of the war*, Deut. xx. 2. or president of the council of war, but in such obscurity, that none of the kings knew they had such a jewel in the treasures of their camp, nor so good a friend in their retinue. We may suppose it was by special direction from heaven that Elisha attended the war, as *the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof*. Thus doth God prevent his people with the blessing of his goodness, and provide his oracles for those that provide them not for themselves. It were often ill with us, if God did not take more care of us, both for soul and body, than we for our selves. 2. That a servant of the king of Israel knew of his being there, when the king himself did not. Probably it was such a servant as Obadiah was to his father Ahab, one that *feared the Lord*; to such a one Elisha made himself known, not to the kings. The account he gives of him is, that it was he that *poured water on the hands of Elisha*, i. e. he was his servant, and, particularly, attended him when he washed his hands. He that will be great, let him learn to minister: He that will rise high, let him begin low.

5. The application which the kings made to Elisha. They went down to him to his quarters, ver. 12. Jehoshaphat had such an honour for a prophet, with whom the word of the Lord was, that he would condescend to visit him in his own person, and not send for him up to him. The other two were moved by the straits they were in, to make their court to the prophet. He that humbled himself was thus exalted, and looked great when three kings came to knock at his door, and beg his assistance, see Rev. iii. 9.

6. The entertainment which Elisha gave them.

(1.) He was very plain with the wicked king of Israel, ver. 13. *What have I to do with thee?* How canst thou expect an answer of peace from me? *Get thee to the prophets of thy father and mother*, whom thou hast countenanced and maintained in thy prosperity, and let them help thee now in thy distress. Elisha was not imposed upon, as Jehoshaphat was, by his partial and hypocritical reformation; he knew, that though he had put away the image of Baal, Baal's prophets were still dear to him, and, perhaps, some of them were now in his camp. *Go, saith he, go to them. Get ye to the gods whom ye have served*, Judg. x. 14. The world and the flesh have ruled you, let them help you; why should God be *enquired of by you?* Ezek. xiv. 3.—Elisha tells him to his face, in a holy indignation at his wickedness,

ness, that he could scarce find in his heart to *look toward him*, or to *see him*, ver. 14. Jehoram is to be respected as a prince, but as a wicked man he is a vile person, and is to be contemned, *Psal.* xv. 4. Elisha, as a subject, will honour him, but as a prophet, he will make him to know his iniquity. For them that had such an extraordinary commission, it was fit, though not for a common person, to say to a king, *Thou art wicked*, Job xxxiv. 18. Jehoram has so much grace as to take it patiently; cares not now for hearing of the prophets of Baal, but is a humble suitor to the God of Israel and his prophet, representing the present case as very deplorable, and humbly recommends it to the prophet's compassionate consideration. In effect, he owns himself unworthy, but let not the other kings be ruined for his sake.

(2.) He shewed a great respect to the godly king of Judah, *regarded his presence*, and for his sake, would *enquire of the Lord* for them all.—It is good being with those that have God's favour, and his prophet's love. Wicked people often fare the better for the friendship and society of those that are godly.

(3.) He composed himself to receive instructions from God: his mind was somewhat ruffled and disturbed at the sight of Jehoram; though he was not put into a sinful heat or passion, nor had spoke unadvisedly, yet his zeal for the present indisposed him for prayer, and the operations of the Spirit, which require a mind very calm and sedate: He therefore called for a musician, ver. 15. a devout musician, one that used to play upon his harp, and sing psalms to it. To hear God's praises sweetly sung, as David had appointed, would cheer his spirits, and settle his mind, and help to put him into a right frame, both to speak to him, and to hear from him. We find a company of prophets prophesying with a *psaltery and a tabret before them*, 1 Sam. x. 5. Those that desire communion with God, must keep their spirits quiet and serene. Elisha being refreshed, and having the tumult of his spirits laid by this divine musick, *the hand of the Lord came upon him*, and his visit did him more honour than that of three kings.

(4.) God by him gave them assurance, that the issue of the present distress would be comfortable and glorious.

1. They should speedily be supplied with water, ver. 16, 17. To try their faith and obedience, he bids them *make the valley full of ditches*, to receive the water. They that expect God's blessings, must prepare room for them, *dig the pools* for the rain to fill, as they did in the valley of Baca, and so made even that a well, *Psal.* lxxxiv. 6. To raise their wonder, he tells them they should have water enough, and yet there should be *neither wind nor rain*. Elijah, by prayer, obtained water out of the clouds, but Elisha fetches it no body knows whence. The spring of these waters shall be as secret as the head of Nile. God is not tied to second causes. Ordinarily, it is by a *plentiful rain* that God *confirms his inheritance*, *Psal.* lxviii. 9. but here it is done without rain, at least, without rain in that place. Some of the *fountains of the great deep*, it is likely, were broken up on this occasion: and, to increase the miracle, *that valley only* (as it should seem) *was filled with water*, and no other place had any share of it.

2. That supply should be an earnest of victory, ver. 18. *This is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord*; you shall not only be saved from perishing, but shall return in triumph. As God gives freely to the unworthy, so he gives richly, like himself, more than we are *able to ask or think*. His grants out-do our requests and expectations. They that sincerely seek for the dews of God's grace, shall have it, and by it be made *more than conquerors*.—It is promised, that they should be masters of the rebels country, and they are permitted to lay it waste, and ruin it, ver. 19. The law forbade them to fell fruit-trees to be employed in their sieges, *Deut.* xx. 19. but not when it was intended in justice for the starving of a country, that had forfeited its fruits, by denying tribute to whom tribute is due.

20. And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat-offering was offered, that behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water. 21. And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them, they gathered all that were able to put on armour, and upward, and stood in the border. 22. And they rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood: 23. And they said, *This is blood*: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another: now therefore, Moab, to the spoil. 24. And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up, and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them: but they went forward smiting the Moabites even in *their country*. 25. And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it, and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees: only in Kir-haraseth left

they the stones thereof: howbeit the slingers went about it, and smote it. 26. ¶ And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew sword, to break through *even* unto the king of Edom: but they could not. 27. Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him *for* a burnt-offering upon the wall: and there was great indignation against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to *their own land*.

We have here the divine gift of both those things which God had promised by Elisha; water, and victory; and the former not only a pledge of the latter, but a means of it. God, that created and commands all the waters both above and beneath the firmament, sent them in abundance of water on a sudden, which did them double service.

1. It *relieved their armies*, which were ready to perish, ver. 20. And, which was very observable, this relief came just at the time of the *offering of the morning sacrifice* upon the altar at Jerusalem, a certain time, and universally known; that time Elisha chose for his *hour of prayer*; (it is likely, *looking towards the temple*, for so they were to do in their prayers, when they were *going out to battle*, and encamped at a distance, 1 Kings viii. 44.) in token of his communion with the temple service, and his expectation of speeding in the virtue of the great sacrifice. We now cannot pitch upon any hour more acceptable than another, because our high priest is always appearing for us, to present and plead his sacrifice. That time God chose for the *hour of mercy*, to put an honour upon the daily sacrifice which had been despised. God answered Daniel's prayer just at the *time of the evening sacrifice*, Dan. ix. 21. for he will own his own institutions.

2. It deceived their enemies, which were ready to triumph, into their destruction. Notice is brought to the Moabites of the advances of the confederate army; to oppose which the posse is raised, *all that were able to put on armour*, and posted upon the frontiers, where they are ready to give them a warm reception, ver. 21. promising themselves, that it would be easy dealing with an army fatigued by so long a march through the wilderness of Edom. But see here,

(1.) How easily they were drawn into their own delusions; observe the steps of their self-deceit. 1. They saw the water in the valley where the army of Israel encamped, and conceived it was blood, ver. 22. because they knew it was a dry valley, and (there having been no rain) could not imagine it should be water. The sun shone upon it, and probably, *the sky was red and lowering*, a presage of *foul weather that day*, Matt. xvi. 3. and so it proved to them. But this making the water look red, their own fancies, which made them willing to believe what made for them, suggested; *This is blood*; God permitting them thus to impose upon themselves. 2. If their camp was thus full of blood, they conclude, certainly the kings have fallen out (as confederates of different interests are apt to do) and they have *slain one another*, ver. 23. for what else should slay them? And, 3. If the armies have slain one another, we have nothing to do but to divide the prey, now therefore *Moab, to the spoil*. These were the gradual suggestions of some elevated fancies among them, that thought themselves wiser and happier in their conjectures than their neighbours; and the rest being desirous it should be so, were forward to believe it was so. *Quod volumus facile credimus*. Thus they that are to be destroyed, are first deceived, Rev. xx. 8. and none are so effectually deceived as those that deceive themselves.

(2.) How fatally they thereby run upon *their own destruction*. They rushed carelessly into the camp of Israel to plunder it, but were undeceived when it was too late. The Israelites, animated by the assurances Elisha had given them of victory, fell upon them with the utmost fury, routed them, and pursued them into their own country, ver. 24. which they laid waste, ver. 25. destroyed the cities, marred the ground, stopped up the wells, felled the timber, and left only the royal city standing; the walls of which they made great breaches in with their battering engines. This they got by rebelling against Israel. Who ever *hardened his heart against God and prospered*?

In the close of the chapter we are told, what the king of Moab did when he found himself reduced to the last extremity by the besiegers, and that his capital city was likely to fall into their hands.

1. He attempted that which was bold and brave. He got together seven hundred choice men, and with them sallied out upon the entrenchment of the king of Edom, who being but a mercenary in this expedition, he hoped would not make any great resistance if he were vigorously attacked, and so he might make his escape that way. But it would not do, even the king of Edom proved too hard for him, and obliged him to retire, ver. 26.

2. This failing, he did that which was brutish and barbarous; he took his own son, his eldest son, that was to succeed him,

him, than whom nothing could be more dear to himself and his people, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall, ver. 27. He designed by this, 1. To obtain the favour of Chemoth, his god, which being a devil, delighted in blood and murder, and the destruction of mankind. The dearer any thing was to them, the more acceptable those idolaters thought it must needs be if offered in sacrifice to their gods, and therefore burnt their children in the fire to their honour. 2. To terrify the besiegers, and oblige them to retire. Therefore he did it upon the wall, in their sight, that they might see what desperate courses he resolved to take rather than surrender, and how dear he would sell his city and life. He intended hereby to render them odious, and to exasperate and enrage his own subjects against them. This effect it had, *there was great indignation against Israel* for driving him to this extremity.—Whereupon they raised the siege, and returned. Tender and generous spirits would not do that, though just, which will drive any man distracted, or make him desperate.

CHAP. IV.

Great service Elisha had done in the foregoing chapter for the three kings; to his prayers and prophecies they owed their lives and triumphs; now one would have expected that the next chapter should have told us what honours and what dignities were done to Elisha for this: that he should presently have been preferred at court, and made prime minister of state: that Jehoshaphat should have taken him home with him, and advanced him in his kingdom. No, the wise man delivered the army, but no man remembered the wise man, Eccl. ix. 15. Or if he had preferred offered him, he declined it: he preferred the honour of doing good in the schools of the prophets, before that of being great in the courts of princes. God magnified him, and that sufficed him; magnified him indeed, for we have him here employed in working no less than five miracles. (1.) He multiplied the poor widow's oil, ver. 1—7. (2.) He obtained for the good Shunamite the blessing of a son in her old age, ver. 8—17. (3.) He raised that child to life, when it was dead, ver. 18—37. (4.) He healed the deadly pottage, ver. 38—41. (5.) He fed a hundred men with twenty small loaves, ver. 42—44.

NOW there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant, my husband, is dead, and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen. 2. And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil. 3. Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, *even* empty vessels, borrow not a few. 4. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee, and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. 5. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her, and upon her sons, who brought *the vessels* to her, and she poured out. 6. And it came to pass when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, *There is not a vessel more.* And the oil stayed. 7. Then she came and told the man of God: and he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.

Elisha's miracles were for use, not for shew; this here was so; an act of real charity; Christ's were so; not only great wonders, but great favours to them for whom they were wrought. God magnifies his goodness with his power.

1. Elisha readily receives a poor widow's complaint: She was a prophet's widow, to whom therefore should she apply herself, but to him, that was a father to the sons of the prophets, and concerned himself in the concerns of their families.—It seems the prophets had wives, as well as the priests; though prophecy went not by entail, as the priesthood did. Marriage is honourable in all, and not inconsistent with the most sacred professions. Now by the complaint of this poor woman, ver. 1. we are given to understand, (1.) That her husband being *one of the sons of the prophets*, was well known to Elisha. Ministers of eminent gifts and stations should make themselves familiar with those that are every way their inferiors, and know their character and state. (2.) That he had the reputation of a godly man. Elisha knew him to be one that feared the Lord, else he had been unworthy of the honour, and unfit for the work of a prophet. He was one that kept his integrity in a time of general apostasy; one of the seven thousand that had not bowed the knee to Baal. (3.) That he was dead, though a good man, a good minister. The prophets, do they live for ever? They that were clothed with the Spirit of prophecy, were not thereby armed against the stroke of death. (4.) That he died poor, and in debt more than he was worth. He did not contract his debts by prodigality, and luxu-

ry, and riotous living, for he was one that feared the Lord, and therefore durst not allow himself in such courses: nay, religion obligeth men not to live above what they have, nor to spend more than what God gives them, no not in expences otherwise lawful; for thereby of necessity they must disable themselves at last to give every one their own, and so prove guilty of a continued act of injustice all along: yet it may be the lot of those that fear God to be in debt and insolvent; through cross providences, losses by sea, or bad debts, or their own imprudence; for the *children of light* are not always *wise for this world*. Perhaps this prophet was impoverished by persecution: when Jezebel ruled, prophets had much ado to live; and if they had families, could scarce make even. (5.) That the creditors were very severe to her. Two sons she had, to be the support of her widowed state, and their labour is reckoned assets in her hand, that must go therefore, and they must be bondmen for seven years, *Exod. xxi. 2.* to work out this debt. Those that leave their families under a load of debt disproportionable to their estates, know not what trouble they entail. In this distress the poor widow goes to Elisha, in dependence upon the promise, that the seed of the righteous shall not be forsaken. The generation of the upright may expect help from God's providence, and countenance from his prophets.

2. He effectually relieves this poor widow's distress, and puts her in a way both to pay her debt, and to maintain her self and her family. He did not say, *be warmed, be filled*, but gave her real help. He did not give her some small matter for her present provision, but set her up in the world to sell oil, and put a stock under her hand to begin with. This was done by miracle, but it is an indication to us what is the best method of charity, and the greatest kindness one can do to poor people, which is, if possible, to help them into a way of improving what little they have by their own industry and ingenuity.

1. He directed her what to do; considered her case; *What shall I do for thee?* The sons of the prophets were poor, and it would signify little to make a collection for her among them: but the God of the holy prophets is able to supply all her needs; and if she has a little under her hands, it must be done by blessing, and increasing that little. He therefore enquires what she had to make money of, and finds she had nothing to sell but one pot of oil, ver. 2. If she had had any plate or furniture, he would have bid her part with it to enable her to be just to her creditors. We cannot reckon that really nor comfortably our own, but that which is so when all our debts are paid. If she had not had this pot of oil, the divine power could have supplied her; but having this, it will work upon this, and so teach us to make the best of what we have. The prophet, knowing her to have credit among her neighbours, bids her borrow of them empty vessels, ver. 3. for it seems she had sold her own, towards the satisfying of her creditors. He directs her to shut the door upon her and her sons; while she filled all those vessels out of that one. She must shut the door, to prevent interruptions from the creditors, and others, while it was in the doing; that they might not seem proudly to boast of this miraculous supply; and that they might have opportunity for prayer and praise to God on this extraordinary occasion. Observe, 1. The oil was to be multiplied in the pouring, as the other widow's meal in the spending. The way to increase what we have, is to use it; to him that so hath, shall be given. It is not hoarding the talents, but trading with them, that doubles them. 2. It must be poured out by herself, not by Elisha, or some of the sons of the prophets, to intimate, that it is upon our careful and diligent endeavours that we may expect the blessing of God to enrich us, both for this world and the other. What we have, will increase best in our own hand.

2. She did it accordingly. She did not tell the prophet he designed to make a fool of her, but firmly believing the divine power and goodness, and in pure obedience to the prophet, she borrowed vessels large and many of her neighbours, and poured out her oil into them; one of her sons was employed to bring her empty vessels, and the other carefully to set aside those that were full, while they were all amazed to find their pot, like a fountain of living water, always flowing, and yet always full; they see not the bubbling spring that supplies it, but believe it to be in him *in whom all our springs are.* Job's metaphor is now verified in the letter, *Job xxix. 6. The rock poured me out rivers of oil.* Perhaps this was in the tribe of Asher, part of whose blessing it was that he should *dip his foot in oil*, Deut. xxxiii. 24.

3. The oil continued flowing as long as she had any empty vessels to receive it; when every vessel was full, the oil stayed, ver. 6. for it was not fit this precious liquor should run over, and be as the water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Note, We are never straitened in God, and in his power and bounty, and the riches of his grace; all our straitness is in our selves. It is our faith that fails, not his promise; He gives above what we ask, were there more vessels there is enough in God to fill them; enough for all, enough for each. Was not this pot of oil exhausted as long as there were any vessels to be filled from it? and shall we fear lest the golden oil which flows from the very root and fatness of the good olive, should fail, as long as there are any lamps to be supplied from it? *Zech. iv. 12.*

4. The prophet directed her what to do with the oil she had, *ver. 7.* She must not keep it for her own use, to *make her face to shine*. Those whom providence has made poor, must be content with poor accommodations for themselves; that is, *knowing how to want*; and must not think when they get a little of that which is better than ordinary, to feed their own luxury: No: (1.) She must sell the oil to those that were rich, and could afford to bestow it on themselves. We may suppose, being produced by miracle, it was the best of its kind, like the wine, *John ii. 10.* so that she might have both a good price, and a quick market for it. Probably, the merchants bought it to export, for oil was one of the commodities that Israel traded in, *Ezek. xxvii. 17.* (2.) She must pay her debt with the money she received for her oil. Though her creditors were too rigorous with her, yet they must not therefore lose their debt. Her first care, now she has wherewithal, must be to discharge that, even before she makes any provision for her children. It is one of the fundamental laws of our religion, that we render to all their due, pay every just debt, give every body their own, though we leave never so little for our selves; and this not of constraint, but willingly, and without grudging; not only for wrath, to avoid being sued, but also for conscience sake. They that bear an honest mind, cannot with pleasure eat their daily bread, unless it be their own bread. (3.) The rest must not be laid up, but she and her children must live upon it, not upon the oil, but upon the money received from it, with which they must put themselves into a capacity of getting an honest livelihood.—No doubt, she did as the man of God directed; and from hence, 1. Let those that are poor and in distress, be encouraged to trust God for supply in the way of duty, *verily thou shalt be fed*, though not feasted. It is true, we cannot now expect miracles, yet we may expect mercies, if we wait on God, and seek to him. Let widows particularly, and prophets widows in a special manner, depend upon him to preserve them, and their fatherless children alive, for to them he will be a husband, a father. 2. Let those whom God hath blessed with plenty, use it for the glory of God, and under the direction of his word: Let them do justly with it, as this widow did, and serve God cheerfully in the use of it; and, as Elisha, be ready to do good to those that need us, be eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame.

8. ¶ And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman, and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. 9. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. 10. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall, and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. 11. And it fell on a day that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there. 12. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. 13. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people. 14. And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. 15. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. 16. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. 17. And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.

The giving of a son to such as were old, and had been long childless, was an ancient instance of the divine power and favour, in the case of Abraham, and Isaac, and Manoah, and Elkana; we find it here among the wonders wrought by Elisha: This was wrought in recompence for the kind entertainment which a good woman gave him, as the promise of a son was given to Abraham when he entertained angels. Observe here,

1. The kindness of the Shunammite woman to Elisha. Things are bad enough in Israel, yet not so bad, but that God's prophet finds friends wherever he goes. Shunem was a city in the tribe of Issachar, that lay in the road between Samaria and Carmel, a road that Elisha often travelled, as we find *chap. ii. 25.* There lived a great woman, who kept a good house, and was very hospitable, her husband having a good estate, and his heart safely trusting in her, and in her discreet management, *Prov. xxxi. 11.* So famous a man as Elisha could not pass or repass

unobserved. Probably, he had used to take some private obscure lodgings in the town; but this pious matron having notice once of his being there, pressed him with great importunity, and with much ado constrained him to dine with her, *ver. 8.* He was modest, and loth to be troublesome; humble, and affected not to associate with those of the first rank; so that it was not without some difficulty, that he was first drawn into an acquaintance there: But afterwards, whenever he came that way in his circuit, he constantly called there. So well pleased was she with her guest, and so desirous of his company, that she will not only bid him welcome to her table, but provide a lodging room for him in her house, that he might make the longer stay, not doubting but her house would be blessed for his sake, and all under her roof edified by his pious instructions and example; a good design; yet she will not do it without acquainting her husband, will neither lay out his money, nor invite strangers to his house, without his consent asked and obtained, *ver. 9, 10.* she suggests to him, 1. That the stranger she would invite was a holy man of God, who therefore would do good to their family, and God would recompence the kindness done to him; perhaps, she had heard how well paid the widow of Sarepta was for entertaining Elijah. 2. That the kindness she intended him would be no great charge to them, she would build him only a little chamber; perhaps, she had no spare room in the house, or none private and retired enough for him, who spent much of his time in contemplation, and cared not for being disturbed with the noise of the family; the furniture shall be very plain, no costly hangings, no stands, no couches, no looking-glasses, but a bed and a table, a stool, and a candlestick, all that was needful for his convenience, not only for his repose, but for his study, his reading and writing; Elisha seems mightily pleased with these accommodations, for he turned in and lay there, *ver. 11.* and as it should seem, his man in the same chamber, for he was far from taking state.

2. Elisha's gratitude for this kindness; being exceedingly pleased with the quietness of his apartment and the friendliness of his entertainment, he began to consider with himself what recompence he should make her; they that receive courtesies, should study to return them; it ill becomes men of God to be ungrateful, or to sponge upon those that are generous.

(1.) He offers to use his interest for her in the king's court, *ver. 13.* *Thou hast been careful for us with all this care*, thus doth he magnify the kindness he received, as those that are humble use to do, though in the purse of one so rich, and in the breast of one so free it was as nothing; now *what shall be done for thee?* As the liberal deviseth liberal things, so the grateful deviseth grateful things. — *Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or the captain of the host*, for an office for thine husband, civil or military? Hast thou any complaint to make, any petition to present, any suit at law depending, that needs the countenance of the higher powers? Wherein can I serve thee? It seems, Elisha had got such an interest by his late services, that though he minded not to prefer himself by it, yet he was capable of preferring his friends; a good man can take as much pleasure in serving others, as in raising himself. — But she needs not any good offices of this kind, to be done for her, *I dwell*, (saith she) *among mine own people*, i. e. we are well as we are, and do not aim at preferment; it is a happiness to dwell among our own people, that love and respect us, and to whom we are in a capacity of doing good, and a greater happiness to be content to do so, to be easy, and to know when we are well; why should those that live comfortably among their own people, covet to live delicately in kings palaces? It would be well with many, if they did but know when they are well. — Some years after this, we find this Shunammite had occasion to be spoken for to the king, though now she needed it not, *chap. viii. 3, 4.* Those that dwell among their own people, yet must not think their mountains stand so strong as that it cannot be moved; they may be driven, as this good woman was, to sojourn among strangers; our continuing city is above.

(2.) He did use his interest for her in the court of heaven, which was far better; Elisha consulted with his servant what kindness he should do for her, such a freedom did this great prophet admit even his servant to; Gehazi tells him she is childless, has a great estate, but no son to leave it to, and was past hopes of having any, her husband is old; if Elisha can obtain this favour from God for her, it will be the removal of that which at present was her only grievance; those are most welcome kindnesses, which are most suited to our necessities. — He sent for her immediately, she very humbly and respectfully stood in the door, *ver. 15.* according to her accustomed modesty, and then he assured her, that within a year she should bring forth a son, *ver. 16.* She had received this prophet in the name of a prophet, and now she had not a courtier's reward, in being spoken for to the king, but a prophet's reward, a signal mercy given by prophets, and in answer to prayer; the promise was a surprise to her, and she begs she may not be flattered by it, *Nay, my lord, thou art a man of God*, and therefore, I hope, speakest seriously, and dost not jest with me, nor lie unto thy handmaid; the event, within the time limited, confirmed the truth

truth of the promise, *she bare a son* at the season that Elisha spoke of, *ver. 17.* God built up her house, in reward of her kindness, in building the prophet a chamber; we may well imagine what joy this brought to the family; *sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear.*

18. ¶ And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. 19. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. 20. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and *then* died. 21. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut *the door* upon him, and went out. 22. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again. 23. And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to day? *it is* neither new moon, nor sabbath. And she said, *It shall be well.* 24. Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not *thy riding* for me, except I bid thee. 25. So she went, and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel: and it came to pass when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, *yonder is* that Shunammite: 26. Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, *Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?* And she answered, *It is well.* 27. And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone, for her soul *is* vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid *it* from me, and hath not told me. 28. Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me? 29. Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. 30. And the mother of the child said, *As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.* And he arose, and followed her. 31. And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child, but *there was* neither voice, nor hearing: wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked. 32. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. 33. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD. 34. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands, and he stretched himself upon the child, and the flesh of the child waxed warm. 35. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro, and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child needed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. 36. And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her: and when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. 37. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed her self to the ground, and took up her son, and went out.

We may well suppose, after the birth of this son, that the prophet was doubly welcome to the good Shunammite, he had thought himself indebted to her, but from henceforth, as long as she lives, she will think herself in his debt, and that she can never do too much for him; we suppose the child very dear to the prophet, as the son of his prayers, and very dear to the parents, as the son of their old age. But here is,

1. The sudden death of the child, though so much a darling; he is so far past the perils of infancy, that he is able to go to the field to his father, who, no doubt, is pleased with his pretty talk, and his joy of his son is greater than the joy of his harvest; but either the cold, or the heat of the open field overcame the child, that was bred tenderly, and he complains to his father that his head aches, *ver. 19.* Whither should we go with our complaints but to our heavenly Father? Thither the Spirit of adoption brings believers with all their grievances, all their desires, teaching them to cry, with groanings that cannot be uttered, *My head, my head; my heart, my heart;* the father sends him to his mother's arms, his mother's lap, little suspecting any danger in his indisposition, but hoping he will drop asleep in his

mother's bosom, and wake well, but it proves fatal, he sleeps the sleep of death, *ver. 20.* well in the morning, and dead by noon, all the mother's care and tenderness cannot keep him alive; this a child of promise, a child of prayer, and given in love, yet taken away; little children lie open to the arrests of sickness and death; but how admirably doth the prudent pious mother keep her tongue under this surprising affliction, not one peevish indecent word comes from her, she has a strong belief that the child will be raised to life again, like a genuine daughter of Abraham's faith as well as Joins, she accounts that God is able to raise him from the dead, for from thence she *received him in a figure*, Heb. xi. 19. She had heard of raising of the widow's son of Sarepta, and that the Spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha, and such confidence had she of God's goodness, that she was very apt to believe, he that so soon took away what he had given, would restore what he had now taken away; by this faith, *women received their dead raised to life*, Heb. xi. 35. In this faith, she makes no preparation for the burial of her dead child, but for its resurrection, for she *lays him on the prophet's bed*, *ver. 21.* expecting that he would stand her friend; *O woman, great is thy faith*, he that wrought it, would not frustrate it.

2. The sorrowful mother's application to the prophet on this sad occasion, for it happened very opportunely that he was now at the college upon mount Carmel, not far off.

(1.) She begged leave of her husband to go to the prophet, yet not acquainting him with her errand, lest he should not have faith enough to let her go, *ver. 22.* he objected, *it is neither new moon or sabbath*, *ver. 23.* which intimates, that on those feasts of the Lord, she used to go to his meeting, with other good people, to hear the word, and to join with him in prayers and praises; she did not think it enough to have his help sometimes in her own family, but, though a great woman, attended on publick worship, for which this was none of the times appointed, wherefore, faith the husband, why wilt thou go to day? what is the matter? no harm, faith she, *It shall be well*, so you will say yourself hereafter; see how this husband and wife vied respects, she was so dutiful to him, that she would not go till she had acquainted him with her journey, and he so loving to her, that he would not oppose it, though she did not think fit to acquaint him with her business.

(2.) She made all the haste she could to the prophet, *ver. 24.* and he seeing her at a distance, sent his servant to enquire whether any thing was amiss, *ver. 25, 26.* The question was particular, *Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?* Note, It well becomes the men of God with tenderness and concern, to enquire about the welfare of their friends, and their families; the answer was general, *It is well*; Gehazi was not the man that she came to complain to, and therefore she puts him off with this; she said little, and little said is soon amended, *Psal. xxxix. 1, 2.* but what she did say was very patient, it is well with me, with my husband, with the child, all well, and yet the child dead in the house. Note, When God calls away our dearest relations by death, it becomes us quietly to say, it is well both with us and them, it is well, for all is well that God doth, all is well with them that are gone, if they are gone to heaven, and all well with us that stay behind, if by the affliction we are furthered in our way thither.

(3.) When she came to the prophet, she humbly reasoned with him concerning her present affliction, she threw herself at his feet, as one troubled and in grief, which she never shewed till she came to him that she believed could help her, *ver. 27.* When her passion would do her service, she knew how to discover it, as well as how to conceal it when it would do her disservice; Gehazi knew his master would not be pleased to see her lie at his feet, and therefore would have raised her up, but Elisha waited to hear from her, since he might not know immediately from God, what was the cause of her trouble; God discovered things to his prophets as he saw fit, not always as they desired; God did not shew this to the prophet, because he might know it from the good woman herself: what she said was very pathetic; she appeals to the prophet, 1. Concerning her indifferency to this mercy which was now taken from her, *Did I desire a son of my lord?* No, thou knowest I did not; it was thine own proposal, not mine, I did not fret for the want of a son, as Hannah, nor beg, as Rachel, *Give me children, or else I die.* Note, When any creature comfort is taken from us, it is well, if we can say through grace, that we did not set our hearts inordinately upon it, for if we did, we have reason to fear it was given in anger, and taken away in wrath. 2. Concerning her entire dependence upon the prophet's word, *did I not say, Do not deceive me?* yes, she did say so, *ver. 16.* and this reflection upon it may be considered either, (1.) As quarrelling with the prophet for deceiving her; she was ready to think herself mocked with the mercy, when it was soon removed, and that it had been better she had never had this child, than to be deprived of him when she began to have comfort in him. Note, The loss of a mercy should not make us undervalue the gift of it; or, (2.) As pleading with the prophet for the raising of the child to life again, *I said, Do not deceive me*, and I know thou wilt not.

Note,

Note, However the providence of God may disappoint us, we may be sure the promise of God never did nor ever will deceive us: hope in that will not make us ashamed.

3. The raising of the child to life again; we may suppose, that the woman gave Elisha a more express account of the child's death, and he gave her a more express promise of his resurrection than is here related, where we are briefly told,

1. That Elisha sent Gehazi to go in all haste to the dead child, gave him his staff, and bid him lay that on the face of the child, *ver. 29.* I know not what to make of this, Elisha knew that Elijah raised the dead child with a very close application, stretching himself upon the child, and praying again and again, and could he think to raise this child by so slight a ceremony as this, especially when nothing hindered but he might come himself? Shall such a power as this be delegated, and to no better a man than Gehazi? Bishop Hall suggests that it was done out of human conceit, and not by divine instinct, and therefore it failed of the effect, God will not have such great favours made too cheap, nor shall they be too easily come by, lest they be undervalued.

2. The woman resolves not to go back without the prophet himself, *ver. 30.* *I will not leave thee,* she had no great expectation from the staff, she will have the hand, and she was in the right of it; perhaps, it was intended hereby to teach us not to put that confidence in creatures that are servants, which the power of the Creator, their Master, and ours, will alone bear the weight of.—Gehazi returns, *re infecta*, without the tidings of any sign of life in the child, *ver. 31.* *The child is not awaked,* intimating, to the comfort of the mother, that its death was but a sleep, and that he expected it would shortly be awaked. — In the raising of dead souls to spiritual life, ministers can do no more by their own power than Gehazi here could, they lay the word, like the prophet's staff, before their faces, but there is neither voice nor hearing, till Christ by his Spirit comes himself, the letter alone kills, it is the spirit that gives life; it is not prophesying upon dry bones that will put life into them, breath must come from heaven and breathe upon those slain.

3. The prophet, by earnest prayer, obtains from God the restoring of this dead child to life again; he found the child dead upon his own bed, *ver. 32.* *Shut the door upon them twain,* *ver. 33.* even the dead child is spoken of as a person, one of the twain, for it was still in being, and not lost; he shut out all company, that he might not seem to glory in the power God had given him, or to use it for ostentation, and to be seen of men.

Observe, (1.) How closely the prophet applied himself to this great operation; perhaps, being sensible that he had tempted God too much, in thinking to effect it by the staff in Gehazi's hand, for which he thought himself rebuked by the disappointment, he now finds it a harder task than he then thought, and therefore addresseth himself to it with great solemnity. (1.) He *prayed unto the Lord,* *ver. 33.* probably, as Elijah had done, *Let this child's soul come into him again;* Christ raised the dead to life as one having authority, *Daniel, arise;* *Young man, I say unto thee arise;* *Lazarus, come forth;* for he was powerful and faithful as a Son, the Lord of life, but Elijah and Elisha did it by petition as servants. 2. He *lay upon the child,* *ver. 34.* as if he would communicate to him some of his vital heat, or spirits; thus he expressed the earnestness of his desire, and gave a sign of that divine power which he depended upon for the accomplishment of this great work; he first *put his mouth to the child's mouth,* as if in God's name he would breathe into him the breath of life, then *his eyes to the child's eyes,* to open them again to the light of life, then *his hands to the child's hands,* to put strength into them. — He then *returned and walked in the house,* as one full of care and concern, and wholly intent upon what he was about; then he went up stairs again, and the second time *stretched himself upon the child,* *ver. 35.* Those that would be instrumental of conveying spiritual life to dead souls, must thus affect themselves with their case, and accommodate themselves to it, and labour fervently in prayer for them.

(2.) How gradually the operation was performed; at the first application, *the face of the child waxed warm,* *ver. 34.* which gave the prophet encouragement to continue instant in prayer; after a while, *the child stirred from times,* which was an indication not only of life, but liveliness; some have reported it as an ancient tradition, That when God breathed into Adam the breath of life, the first evidence of his being alive was sneezing, which gave rise to the usage of paying respect to those that sneeze. — Some observe here, that sneezing clears the head, and therefore lay the child's disempower.

(3.) How joyfully the child was returned alive to his mother, *ver. 36, 37.* and all parties concerned *were in a little comforted,* *Abs xx. 12.* See the power of God, who kills and makes alive again; see the power of prayer, as it has the key of the clouds, so it has the key of death; see the power of faith; that fixed law of nature, that death is a way whence there is no returning, shall rather be dissembled with, than this believing Shunammite shall be disappointed.

38. ¶ And Elisha came again to Gilgal, and *there* was a dearth in the land, and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him: and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets. 39. And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap-ful, and came and shred *them* into the pot, of pottage: for they knew *them* not. 40. So they poured out for the men to eat: and it came to pass as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O thou man of God, *there is death in the pot:* and they could not eat *thereof.* 41. But he said, Then bring meal: and he cast *it* into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat: and there was no harm in the pot. 42. ¶ And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the first-fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof: and he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat. 43. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the LORD, They shall eat, and shall leave *thereof.* 44. So he set *it* before them, and they did eat, and left *thereof,* according to the word of the LORD.

We have here Elisha in this place, in his element, among the sons of the prophets, teaching them, and, as a father, providing for them, and happy it was for them that they had one over them, who naturally cared for their state, under whom they were well fed and well taught; there was a dearth in the land, for the wickedness of them that dwelt therein, the same that we read of, *chap. viii. 1.* it continued seven years, just as long again as that in Elijah's time; a famine of bread there was, but not of hearing the word of God, for Elisha had the sons of the prophets sitting before him to hear his wisdom, who were taught that they might teach others; two instances we have here of the care he took about their meat, Christ twice fed those whom he preached to; Elisha was in the more care about it now because of the dearth, that the sons of the prophets might not be ashamed in this evil time, but even in *the days of famine might be satisfied,* *Psal. xxxvii. 19.*

1. He made hurtful food to become safe and wholesome.

(1.) On the lecture day, the sons of the prophets being all to attend, he ordered his servant to provide food for their bodies, while he was breaking to them the bread of life for their souls; whether there was any flesh meat for them doth not appear, he orders only that pottage should be seethed for them of herbs, *ver. 38.* The sons of the prophets should be examples of temperance and mortification, not desirous of dainties, but content with plain food; if they have neither savoury meats, nor sweet meats, nay, if a mess of pottage be all the dinner, let them remember this great prophet dined himself and his guests no better.

(2.) One of the servitors that was sent to gather herbs, (which, it should seem, must serve instead of flesh for the pottage) by mistake, brought in that which was noxious, or at least very nauseous, and shred it into the pottage, wild gourds they are called, *ver. 39.* Some think it was *colequintida*, an herb that purgeth strongly, and if not qualified, is dangerous; the sons of the prophets, it seems, were better skilled in divinity than in natural philosophy, and read their Bibles more than their Herbals; if any of the fruits of the earth be hurtful, we must look upon it as an effect of the curse, *thorns and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee,* for the original blessing made all good.

(3.) The guests complained to Elisha of the unwholesomeness of their food; nature has given man the sense of tasting, not only that wholesome food may be pleasant, but that that which is unwholesome may be discovered before it comes to the stomach; the mouth tries meat by tasting it, *Job xii. 11.* This pottage was soon found by the taste of it to be dangerous, so that they cried out, *there is death in the pot,* *ver. 40.* The table oft becomes a snare, and that which should be for our welfare proves a trap, which is a good reason why we should not feed our selves without fear; when we are receiving the supports and comforts of life we must keep up an expectation of death and a fear of sin.

(4.) Elisha presently cured the ill taste, and prevented the ill consequences of this unwholesome pottage; as before he had healed the bitter waters with salt, so now the bitter broth by meal, *ver. 41.* It is likely there was meal in it before, but that was put in by a common hand only to thicken the pottage, this was the same thing, but cast in by Elisha's hand, and with intent to heal the pottage, by which it appears that the change was not owing to the meal, (that was the sign only, not the means) but to the divine power; now all was well, not only no death, but no harm in the pot; we must acknowledge God's goodness in making our

our food wholesome and nourishing; *I am the Lord that bealeth thee.*

2. He made a little food to go a great way.

1. Elifha had a present brought him of twenty barley loaves and some ears of corn, *ver. 42.* a present which in those ages would not be despicable at any time, but now in a special manner valuable, when there was a dearth in the land.—It is said to be of the first fruits, which was God's due out of their increase; and when the priests and Levites were all at Jerusalem, out of their reach, the religious people among them, with good reason, looked upon the prophets as God's receivers, and brought their first-fruits to them, which helped to maintain their schools.

2. Having freely received he freely gave, ordering it all to be set before the sons of the prophets, reserving none for himself, none for hereafter, *let the morrow take thought for the things of itself,* give it all to the people that they may eat; it well becomes the men of God to be generous and open handed, and the fathers of the prophets to be liberal to the sons of the prophets.

3. Though the loaves were little, it is likely, no more than what one man would ordinarily eat at a meal, yet with twenty of them he filled a hundred men, *ver. 43, 44.* His servant thought to set so little meat before so many men was but to tantalize them, and shame his master for making so great an invitation to such short commons, but he in God's name pronounced it a full meal for them, and so it proved; they did eat, and left thereof, not because their stomachs failed them, but because the bread increased in the eating; God has promised his church, *Psal. cxxxii. 15. that he will abundantly bless her provision, and satisfy her poor with bread;* for whom he feeds he fills, and what he blesteth comes to much, as what he blows upon comes to little, *Hagg. i. 9.*—Christ's feeding his hearers was a miracle far beyond this, but both teach us that those who wait upon God in the way of duty, may hope to be both protected and supplied by a particular care of divine providence.

C H A P. V.

Two more of Elifha's miracles are recorded in this chapter, 1.

The cleansing of Naaman, a Syrian, a stranger, from his leprosy, and there, (1.) The badness of his case, ver. 1. (2.) The providences that brought him to Elifha, the intelligence given him by a captive maid, ver. 2—4. A letter from the king of Syria to the king of Israel to introduce him, ver. 5—7. And the invitation Elifha sent him, ver. 8. (3.) The method prescribed for his cure; his submission, with much ado, to that method, and his cure thereby, ver. 6—14. (4.) The grateful acknowledgments he made to Elifha hereupon, ver. 15—19.

2. *The smiting of Gehazi, his own servant, with that leprosy. (1.) Gehazi's sins, which were belying his master to Naaman, ver. 20—24. and lying to his master when he examined him, ver. 25. (2.) His punishment for this sin, Naaman's leprosy was entailed on his family, ver. 26, 27. And if Naaman's cure was typical of the calling of the Gentiles, as our Saviour seems to make it, Luke iv. 27. Gehazi's stroke may be looked upon as typical of the blinding and rejecting of the Jews, who envied God's grace to the Gentiles, as Gehazi envied Elifha's favour to Naaman.*

1. **N**OW Naaman captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, *but he was a leper.* 2. And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid, and she waited on Naaman's wife. 3. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria: for he would recover him of his leprosy. 4. And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. 5. And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. 6. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayst recover him of his leprosy. 7. And it came to pass when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me. 8. ¶ And it was so, when Elifha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now

Nº. 27.

to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.

Our Saviour's miracles were intended for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, yet one, like a crumb, fell from the table to a woman of Canaan, so this one miracle Elifha wrought for Naaman, a Syrian; for God doth good to all, and will have all men to be saved. Here is,

1. The great affliction Naaman was under in the midst of all his honours, *ver. 1.* He was a great man, in a great place, not only rich and raised, but particularly happy for two things, (1.) That he had been very serviceable to his country, God made him so; by him the Lord had oft given deliverance to Syria, success in their wars even with Israel.—The preservation and prosperity even of those that do not know God and serve him must be ascribed to him, for *he is the Saviour of all men, but especially of them that believe.*—Let Israel know, that when the Syrians prevailed it was from the Lord. (2.) That he was very acceptable to his prince, was his favourite, and prime minister of state; so great was he, so high, so honourable, and a mighty man of valour, but he was a leper, was under that loathsome disease, which made him a burthen to himself. Note, 1. No man's greatness, or honour, or interest, valour or victory, can set him out of the reach of the worst calamities of human life; there is many a sickly crazy body under rich and gay clothing. 2. Every man has some but or other in his character, something that blemisheth and diminisheth him, some allay to his grandeur, some damp to his joy, very happy, very good, yet in something or other not so good as he should be, nor so happy as he would be; Naaman was as great as the world could make him, and yet (as bishop Hall expresseth it) the basest slave in Syria would not change skins with him.

2. The notice that was given him of Elifha's power by a little maid that waited on his lady, *ver. 2, 3.* This maid was by birth an Israelite, providentially carried captive into Syria, and there preferred into Naaman's family, where she publisheth Elifha's fame, to the honour of Israel and Israel's God; the unhappy dispersing of the people of God, hath sometimes proved the happy occasion of the diffusion of the knowledge of God, *Acts viii. 4.* This little maid, (1.) As became a true born Israelite, consulted the honour of her country, could give an account, though but a girl, of the famous prophet they had among them; children should betimes acquaint themselves with the wondrous works of God, that wherever they go they may have them to talk of. See *Psal. viii. 2.*—(2.) As became a good servant she desired the health and welfare of her master, though she was captive, a servant by force, much more should servants of choice seek their master's good; the Jews in Babylon were to seek the peace of the land of their captivity, *Jer. xxix. 7.*—Elifha had not cleansed any lepers in Israel, (Luke iv. 27.) yet this little maid from the other miracles he had wrought, infers, that he could cure her master, and from his common beneficence infers that he would do it, though he was a Syrian; servants may be blessings to the families where they are, by telling what they know of the glory of God and the honour of his prophets.

3. The application which the king of Syria hereupon made to the king of Israel on Naaman's behalf; Naaman took notice of the intelligence, though given by a simple maid, and did not despise it for the sake of her meanness when it tended to his bodily health; he did not say, the girl talks like a fool, how can any prophet of Israel do that for me which all the physicians of Syria have attempted in vain? Though he neither loved nor honoured the Jewish nation, yet if one of that nation, can but cure him of his leprosy, he will be his humble servant.—O that they who are spiritually diseased would hearken thus readily to the tidings brought them of the great physician!

See what Naaman did upon this little hint, (1.) He would not send for the prophet to come to him, but such honour would he pay to one that had so much of a divine power with him as to be able to cure diseases, that he would go to him himself, though he himself was sickly, unfit for society, the journey long, and into an enemy's country; princes, he thinks, must stoop to prophets when they need them. (2.) He would not go incognito and in disguise, though his errand proclaimed his loathsome disease, but went in state, and with a great retinue, to do the more honour to the prophet.—(3.) He would not go empty handed, but took with him gold, and silver, and raiment, to present to his physician; those that have wealth and want health, shew which they reckon the more valuable blessing; what will they not give for ease, and strength, and soundness of body? (4.) He would not go without a letter to the king of Israel from the king his master, who did himself earnestly desire his recovery; he knows not where in Samaria to find this wonder-working prophet, but takes it for granted the king knows where to find him, and to engage the prophet to do his utmost for Naaman, he shall come to him supported with the interest of two kings; if the king of Syria must intreat his help, he hopes the king of Israel, being his liege-lord, may command it; the gifts of the subject must all be (he thinks) for the service and honour of the prince, and therefore desires the king that he would recover the leper, *ver. 6.* taking it for granted,

ed, there was a greater intimacy between the king and the prophet than really there was.

4. The alarm this gave to the king of Israel, *ver. 7.* He apprehended there was in this letter, (1.) A great affront upon God, and therefore he rent his clothes, according to the custom of the Jews, when they heard or read that which they thought blasphemous; and what less could it be, than to attribute to him a divine power? *Am I a God, to kill whom I will, and make alive whom I will?* No, I pretend not to such an authority; Nebuchadnezzar did, as we find, *Dan. v. 19. Am I a God, to kill with a word, and make alive with a word?* No, I pretend not to such a power; thus this great man, this bad man, is made to own that he is but a man: Why did he not with this consideration correct himself for his idolatry, and reason thus? Shall I worship those as gods, that can neither kill nor make alive? can *he neither good nor evil?* — (2.) An ill design upon himself; he appeals to those about him for this, *see how he seeketh a quarrel against me*; he requires me to recover the leper, and if I do not, though I cannot, he will make that a pretence to wage war with me, which he suspects the rather, because Naaman was his general; had he rightly understood the meaning of the letter, that when the king wrote to him to recover the leper, he meant, that he would take care he might be recovered, he had not been in this fright. — Note; We often create a great deal of uneasiness to our selves, by misinterpreting the words and actions of others that are well intended; it is charity to our selves to think no evil. — If he had bethought himself of Elisha, and his power, he would easily have understood the letter, and have known what he had to do, but he is put into this confusion, by making himself a stranger to the prophet; the captive maid had him more in her thoughts than the king had.

5. The profer which Elisha made of his service; he was willing to do any thing to make his prince easy, though he was neglected, and his former good services forgotten by him; hearing on what occasion the king had rent his clothes, he sent to him, to let him know, that if his patient would come to him, he should not lose his labour, *ver. 8. he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel*, and it were sad with Israel if there were not; that there is a prophet in Israel, who can do that which the king of Israel dares not attempt, which the prophets of Syria cannot pretend to; it was not for his own honour, but for the honour of God, that he coveted to make them all know, *that there is a prophet in Israel*, though obscure and overlooked.

9. So Naaman came with his horses, and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. 10. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again unto thee, and thou shalt be clean. 11. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. 12. *Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?* So he turned and went away in a rage. 13. And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee *do some great thing*, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean? 14. Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

We have here the cure of Naaman's leprosy.

1. The short and plain direction which the prophet gave him, with assurance of success; Naaman designed to do honour to Elisha, when he came in his chariot, and with all his retinue to Elisha's door, *ver. 4.* They that shewed little respect to prophets at other times, when they needed them were very complaisant to them, he attended at Elisha's door as a beggar for an alms; they that would be cleansed from their spiritual leprosy, must wait at *wisdom's gate, and watch at the posts of her doors*; Naaman expected to have his compliment returned, but Elisha gave him his answer without any formality, would not go to the door to him, lest he should seem too much pleased with the honour done him, but sent a message to him, bidding him *Go wash in Jordan seven times*, and promising him, that if he did so, his disease should be cured; the promise was very express, *Thou shalt be clean*; the method prescribed was plain, *Go wash in Jordan*; this was not intended as any means of the cure; though cold bathing is recommended by many as a very wholesome thing, yet some think in the case of a leprosy it was rather hurtful; but it was intended as a sign of the cure, and a trial of his obe-

dience; they that will be helped of God, must do as they are bidden. — But why did Elisha send a messenger to him with these directions? 1. Because he was retired at this time for devotion, was intent upon his prayers for the cure, and would not be diverted; or, 2. Because he knew Naaman to be a proud man, and he would let him know, that before the great God, all men stand upon the same level.

2. Naaman's disgust at the method prescribed, because it was not what he expected; two things disgusted him. (1.) That Elisha, as he thought, put a slight upon his person, in sending him orders by a servant, and not coming to him himself, *ver. 11.* Being big with the expectations of a cure, he had been fancying how this cure would be wrought, and the scheme he had laid was this, *he will surely come out to me*, that is the least he can do to me, a peer of Syria, to me, that am come to him in all this state, to me, that have so often been victorious over Israel; *he will stand, and call on the name of his God*, and name me in his prayer, and then he will *wave his hand over the place*, and so effect the cure; and because the thing is not done just thus, he falls into a passion, forgetting, 1. That he was a leper, and the law of Moses, which Elisha would religiously observe, shut those out from society, a leper, and therefore ought not to insist upon the punctilio's of honour. Note, Many have hearts unhumbled under humbling providences, see *Numb. xii. 14.* 2. That he was a petitioner, suing for a favour which he could not demand, and beggars must not be choosers, patients must not prescribe to their physician; see in Naaman the folly of pride; a cure will not content him, unless he be cured with ceremony, with a great deal of pomp and parade; he scorns to be healed, unless he be humoured. (2.) That Elisha, as he thought, put a slight upon his country; he took it heinously that he must be sent to wash in Jordan, a river of Israel, when he thought *Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel*; how magnificently doth he speak of these two rivers that watered Damascus, which soon after fell into one called by geographers *Chrysorroas*, The golden stream; how scornfully doth he speak of all the waters of Israel, though God had called the land of Israel the glory of all lands, and particularly, for its *brooks of water*, *Deut. viii. 7.* so common it is for God and man to differ in their judgments; how slightly doth he speak of the prophet's directions? *may I not wash in them and be clean?* he might wash in them, and be clean from dirt, but not wash in them, and be clean from leprosy. — He was angry that the prophet bid him wash and be clean, he thought the prophet must do all, and is not pleased that he is bid to do any thing; or he thinks this too cheap, too plain, too common a thing for so great a man to be cured by; or he did not believe it would at all effect the cure, or if it would, what medicinal virtue was there in Jordan more than in the rivers of Damascus? But he did not consider, 1. That Jordan belonged to Israel's God, from whom he was to expect the cure, and not from the gods of Damascus; it watered the Lord's land, the holy land, and, in a miraculous cure, relation to God was much more considerable than the depth of the channel, or the beauty of the stream. 2. That Jordan had more than once before this obeyed the commands of Omnipotence, it had of old yielded a passage to Israel, and of late to Elijah and Elisha, and therefore was fitter for such a purpose than those rivers; that he only observed the common law of their creation, and had never been thus distinguished; but above all, Jordan was the river appointed, and if he expect a cure from the divine power, he ought to acquiesce in the divine will without asking why or wherefore. Note, It is common for those that are wise in their own conceits, to look with contempt on the dictates and prescriptions of divine wisdom, and to prefer their own fancies before them; they that are for *establishing their own righteousness*, will not submit to the *righteousness of God*, *Rom. x. 3.*

Naaman talked himself into such a heat, (as passionate men use to do) that he turned away from the prophet's door, in a rage, ready to swear he would never have any thing more to say to Elisha; and who then would be the loser? Note, *They that observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercies*, *Jonah ii. 8.* Proud men are the worst enemies to themselves, and foreclose their own redemption.

3. The modest advice which his servants gave him, to observe the prophet's prescriptions, with an implicit reproof of his resentments, *ver. 13.* Though at other times they kept their distance, and now saw him in a passion, yet knowing him to be a man that would hear reason, at any time, and from any body, (a good character of great men, and a very rare one) they drew near, and made bold to argue the matter a little with him. They had conceived a great opinion of the prophet, (having, perhaps, heard more of him from the common people, whom they had conversed with, than Naaman had heard from the king and courtiers, whom he had conversed with) and therefore begged of him to consider; *If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing*, had ordered thee into a tedious course of physick, or to submit to some painful operation, suppose blistering, or cupping, or salivating, *Wouldest thou not have done it?* no doubt thou wouldest. And wilt thou not submit to so easy a method as this, *wash and be clean?*

Observe,

Observe, (1.) His own servants gave him this reproof and counsel, which was no more disparagement to him, than that he had intelligence of one that could cure him from his wife's maid, *ver. 2.* Note, It is a great mercy to have those about us, that will be free with us, and faithfully tell us of our faults and follies, though they be our inferiors. Masters must be willing to hear reason from their servants, *Job xxxi. 12, 13.* As we should be deaf to the counsel of the ungodly, though given by the most great and venerable names; so we should have our ear open to good advice, though brought us by those who are much below us: no matter who speaks it, if it be well said.

(2.) The reproof was very modest and respectful; they call him, father; for servants must honour and obey their masters with a kind of filial affection. In giving reproof and counsel, we must make it appear that it comes from love and true honour, and we intend not reproach, but reformation.

(3.) It was very rational and considerate. If the rude and unthinking servants had stirred up their master's angry resentments, and offered to revenge his quarrel upon the prophet, who (he thought) affronted him, how ill had the consequences been: fire from heaven sure upon them all! But they, to our great surprise, took the prophet's part. Elisha, (though, it is likely, he perceived how what he had said had put Naaman out of humour) yet did not take care to pacify him; it was at his peril, if he persisted in his wrath: but his servants are made use of by providence to reduce him to temper. They reason with him, 1. From his earnest desire of a cure, *Wouldst thou not do any thing?* Note, When diseased sinners are come to this, that they are content to do any thing, to submit to any thing, to part with any thing for a cure, then, and not till then, there begins to be some hopes of them. Then they will take Christ on his own terms, when they are made willing to have Christ upon any terms. 2. From the easiness of the method prescribed; it is but wash and be clean. Sir, it is but trying, the experiment is cheap and easy, it can do no hurt, but may do good. Note, The methods prescribed for the healing of the leprosy of sin are so plain, that we are utterly inexcusable if we do not observe them. It is but believe and be saved, repent and be pardoned, wash and be clean.

4. The cure effected in the use of the means prescribed, *ver. 14.* Naaman, upon second thoughts, yielded to make the experiment, yet, it should seem, with no great faith or resolution; for whereas the prophet bid him wash in Jordan seven times, he did but dip himself so many times, as lightly as he could. However God is pleased so far to honour himself and his word, as to make that effectual. *His flesh came again like the flesh of a child,* to his great surprise and joy. This men get by yielding to the will of God, by attending to his institutions. His being cleansed by washing, put an honour on the law for cleansing lepers: God will magnify his word above all his name.

15. ¶ And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that *there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel:* now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. 16. But he said, *As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none.* And he urged him to take it, but he refused. 17. And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering, nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD. 18. In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, *that* when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing. 19. And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way.

Of the ten lepers that our Saviour cleansed, the only one that returned to give thanks, was a Samaritan, *Luke xvii. 16.* This Syrian did so, who here speaks himself,

1. Convinced of the power of the God of Israel, not only that he is God, but that he is God alone, and that indeed, *there is no God in all the earth but in Israel, ver. 15.* A noble confession! but such as speaks the misery of the Gentile world; for the nations that had many gods, really had no God, but were without God in the world. He had sometimes thought the gods of Syria gods indeed, but now experience had rectified his mistake, and he knew Israel's God was God alone, the sovereign Lord of all. Had he seen other lepers cleansed, perhaps, it had not convinced him, but the mercy of the cure affected him more than the miracle of it. Those are best able to speak of the power of divine grace, who have themselves experienced it.

2. Grateful to Elisha the prophet; therefore for his sake, whose servant thou art, I have a present for thee, silver, and gold, and raiment, whatever thou wilt please to accept. He valued the cure, not by the easiness of it to the prophet, but the acceptableness of it to himself, and would gladly pay for it accordingly. But Elisha generously refused the fee, though urged to accept it, and, to prevent farther importunity, backed his refusal with an oath, *As the LORD liveth I will receive none, ver. 16.* not because he did not need it, for he was poor enough, and knew what to do with it, and how to bestow it among the sons of the prophets; nor because he thought it unlawful, for he received presents from others, but he would not be beholden to this Syrian, nor should he say, *I have made Elisha rich, Gen. xiv. 23.* It would be much for the honour of God to shew this new convert, that the servants of the God of Israel were taught to look upon the wealth of this world with a holy contempt, which would confirm him in his belief, that *there is no God but in Israel.* See *1 Cor. ix. 18. 2 Cor. xi. 9.*

3. Profelyted to the worship of the God of Israel. He will not only offer a sacrifice to the Lord in thanks for his present cure, but he resolves he will never offer sacrifice to any other gods, *ver. 17.* It was a happy cure of his leprosy, which cured him of his idolatry, a more dangerous disease. But here are two instances of his weakness and infirmity in his conversion.

(1.) In one instance he over-did it, that he would not only worship the God of Israel, but he would have clods of earth out of the prophet's garden, or at least of the prophet's ordering him, to *make an altar of,* *ver. 17.* He that a while ago had spoken very slightly of the *waters of Israel, ver. 12.* now is in another extreme, and overvalues the earth of Israel, supposing, (since God had appointed *altars of earth, Exod. xx. 24.*) an altar of that earth would be most acceptable to him; not considering, that all *the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.* Or, perhaps, the transport of his affection and veneration for the prophet, not only upon the account of his power, but of his virtue and generosity, made him, as we say, love the very ground he went upon, and desire to have some of it home with him. The modern compliment equivalent to this would be, Pray, sir, let me have your picture.

(2.) In another instance he under-did it; that he reserved himself a liberty to bow in the house of Rimmon, in complaisance to the king his master, and according to the duty of his place at court, *ver. 18.* *in this thing* he must be excused. He owns he ought not to do it, but that he cannot otherwise keep his place; protests his bowing is not, nor ever shall be, as it had been, in honour to the idol, but only in honour to the king; and therefore, he hopes, God will forgive him. Perhaps, all things considered, this might be excusable in Naaman, though not justifiable: But as to us, I am sure, 1. If in covenanting with God, we make a reservation for any known sin, which we will continue to indulge ourselves in, that reservation is a defeasance of his covenant. We must cast away all our transgressions, and not except any house of Rimmon. 2. Though we are encouraged to pray for the remission of the sins we have committed, yet if we ask for a dispensation to go on in any sin for the future, we mock God, and deceive our selves. 3. Those that know not how to quit a place at court, when they cannot keep it without sinning against God, and wronging their consciences, do not rightly value the divine favour. 4. Those that truly hate evil, will make conscience of abstaining from all appearances of evil. The prophet, though he cannot approve his dissembling of his religion; yet because his promise to offer no sacrifice to any god but the God of Israel only, was a great point gained with a Syrian, and by asking pardon in this matter, he shewed such a degree of conviction and ingenuity, as gave hopes of improvement, the prophet took fair leave of him, and bid him, *Go in peace, ver. 19.* Young converts must be tenderly dealt with.

20. ¶ But Gehazi the servant of Elisha the man of God said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman the Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but *as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.* 21. So Gehazi followed after Naaman: and when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, *Is all well?* 22. And he said, All is well: my master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. 23. And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants, and they bare them before him. 24. And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house;

house; and he let the men go, and they departed. 25. But he went in, and stood before his master: and Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. 26. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive-yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants? 27. The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.

Naaman a Syrian, a courtier, a soldier, had many servants, and we read how wise and good they were, *ver.* 13. Elisha, a holy prophet, a man of God, has but one servant, and he proves a base, lying, naughty fellow. They that heard of Elisha at a distance, honoured him, and got good by what they heard, but he that stood continually before him to hear his wisdom, had no good impressions made upon him either by his doctrine or miracles. One would expect that Elisha's servant should be a saint, even Ahab's servant Obadiah was, but even Christ himself had a Judas among his followers. The means of grace cannot give grace. The best men, the best ministers, have often had those about them, that have been their grief and shame. The nearer the church, the farther from God. *Many come from the east and west to sit down with Abraham, when the children of the kingdom shall be cast out.*

Here is, (1.) Gehazi's sin. It was a complicated sin:

1. The love of money, that root of all evil, was at the bottom of it. His master contemned Naaman's treasures, but he coveted them, *ver.* 20. His heart (saith bishop Hall) was packed up in Naaman's chests, and he must run after him to fetch it. Multitudes, by coveting worldly wealth, have *erred from the faith*, and *pierced themselves with many sorrows*.

2. He blamed his master for refusing Naaman's present, condemned him as foolish, in not taking gold when he might have it, envied and grudged at his kindness and generosity to this stranger, though it was for the good of his soul. In short, he thinks himself wiser than his master.

3. When Naaman, like a gentleman, lighted from his chariot to meet him, *ver.* 21. he told him a delicate lie, that his master sent him to him, and so he received that courtesy to himself, which Naaman intended to his master.

4. He abused his master, and basely misrepresented him to Naaman, as one that had soon repented of his generosity, that was fickle, and did not know his own mind, that would say and unsay, swear and unswear, that would not do an honourable thing, but he must presently undo it again. His story of the two sons of the prophets was as silly as it was false; if he would have begged a token for two young scholars, sure less than a talent of silver might serve them.

5. There was danger of his alienating Naaman from that holy religion which he had espoused, and lessening his good opinion of it: He would be ready to say as Paul's enemies suggested concerning him, 2 Cor. xii. 16, 17. that though Elisha himself did not burthen him, yet being crafty, he caught him with guile, sending those that made a gain of him. We hope, he understood afterwards that Elisha's hand was not in it, and that Gehazi was forced to restore what he had unjustly got, else it might have driven him to his idols again.

6. His seeking to conceal what he had unjustly got, added much to his sin. (1.) He hid it, as Achan did his gain by sacrilege, in the tower, a secret place, a strong place, till he had an opportunity of laying it out, *ver.* 24. Now he thought himself sure of it, and applauded his own management of a fraud, by which he had imposed not only upon the prudence of Naaman, but upon Elisha's spirit of discerning, as Ananias and Sapphira upon the apostles. (2.) He denied it: he *went in and stood before his master*, ready to receive his orders; none looked more observant of his master, though really none more abusive to him; he thought as Ephraim, *I am become rich, but they shall find no iniquity in me*, Hos. xii. 8. His master asked him, whence he had been? no where, sir, (saith he) out of the house. Note, One lie commonly begets another: The way of that sin is down-hill, therefore dare to be true.

(2.) The punishment of this sin. Elisha presently called him to an account for it; and observe,

1. How he was convicted. He thought to impose upon the prophet, but was soon given to understand that the Spirit of prophecy could not be deceived, and that it was in vain to lie to the Holy Ghost. Elisha could tell him, 1. What he had done, though he had denied it. Thou sayst thou wentest no whither, but *went not my heart with thee?* *ver.* 26. Was Gehazi yet to learn that prophets had spiritual eyes; or could he think to hide any thing from a seer, from him with whom the secret of the Lord was. Note, It is folly to presume upon sin in hopes of secrecy. When thou goest aside into any by-path, doth not thy own conscience go with thee? doth not the eye of God go

with thee? *He that covers his sin shall not prosper*; particularly, *a lying tongue is but for a moment*, Prov. xii. 19. Truth will out, and often comes to light strangely, to the confusion of those that make lies their refuge. 2. What he designed, though he kept that in his own breast. He could tell him the very thoughts and intents of his heart, that he was projecting now he had got these two talents, to purchase ground and cattle, to leave Elisha's service, and to set up for himself. Note, All the foolish hopes and contrivances of carnal worldlings, are open before God. And he tells him also the evil of it, *Is it a time to receive money?* Is this an opportunity of enriching thy self? Couldst thou find no better a way of getting money, than by belying thy master, and laying a stumbling block before a young convert? Note, Those that are for getting wealth at any time, and by any ways and means whatsoever, right or wrong, lay themselves open to a great deal of temptation. They that will be rich, (*per fas per nefas*; *rem, rem, quocunque modo rem*) *drawn themselves in destruction and perdition*, 1 Tim. vi. 9. War, and fire, and plague, and shipwreck, are not, as many make them, times to get money by. It is not a time to increase our wealth, when we cannot do it but in such ways as are dishonourable to God and religion, or injurious to our brethren, or the publick.

2. How he was punished for it. *The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to thee*, *ver.* 27. If he will have his money, he shall take his disease with it, *transit cum onere*. He was contriving to entail lands upon his posterity; but instead of them, entails a loathsome disease, on the heirs of his body, from generation to generation. The sentence was immediately executed on himself; no sooner said than done, he *went out from his presence a leper as white as snow*. Thus he is stigmatized and made infamous, and carries the mark of his shame wherever he goes: Thus he loads himself and family with a curse, which shall not only for the present proclaim his villainy, but for ever perpetuate the remembrance of it. Note, *The getting of treasures by a lying tongue, is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death*, Prov. xxi. 6. Those who get wealth by fraud and injustice, cannot expect either the comfort or the continuance of it. What was Gehazi profited, though he gained his two talents, when thereby he lost his health, his honour, his peace, his service, and, if repentance prevented not, his soul for ever, see *Job* xx. 12, &c.

CHAP. VI.

In this chapter we have, (1.) A farther account of the wondrous works of Elisha. 1. His making iron to swim, *ver.* 1—7. 2. His disclosing to the king of Israel the secret counsels of the king of Syria, *ver.* 8—12. 3. His saving himself out of the hands of those who were sent to apprehend him, *ver.* 13—23. (2.) The besieging of Samaria by the Syrians, and the great distress the city was reduced to, *ver.* 24—33. The relief of it is another of the wonders wrought by Elisha's word, which we shall have the story of in the next chapter. Elisha is still a great blessing both to church and state, both to the sons of the prophets, and to his prince.

1. **A**ND the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. 2. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye. 3. And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go. 4. So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. 5. But as one was felling a beam, the ax-head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas master, for it was borrowed. 6. And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither, and the iron did swim. 7. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it.

Several things may be observed here.

1. Concerning the sons of the prophets, and their condition and character. The college here spoken of seems to be that at Gilgal, for there Elisha was, *chap.* iv. 38. and it was near Jordan; and probably wherever Elisha resided, as many as could of the sons of the prophets flocked to him for the advantage of his instructions, counsels, and prayers. Every one would covet to dwell with him, and be near him. Those that would be teachers, should lay out themselves to get the best advantages for learning. Now observe,

1. Their number increased, so that they wanted room. *The place is too strait for us*, *ver.* 1. A good hearing! for it is a sign many are added to them. Elisha's miracles, doubtless, drew in many; perhaps, they increased the more now Gehazi was cashiered,

cashiered, and, it is likely, an honest man put in his room, to take care of their provisions, for it should seem by that instance, *chap. iv. 23.* that Naaman's case was not the only one in which he grudged his master's generosity.

2. They were humble men, and did not affect that which was gay, or great. When they wanted room, they did not speak of sending for cedars, and marble stones, and curious artificers, but only of getting every man a beam, to run up some sorry hut or cottage with. It becomes the sons of the prophets, who profess to look for great things in the other world, to be content with mean things in this.

3. They were poor men, and men that had no interest in great ones. It was a sign Joram was king, and Jezebel ruled too, else the sons of the prophets, when they wanted room, needed only to apply themselves to the government, not to have consulted among themselves about the enlargement of their buildings. God's prophets have seldom been the world's favourites. Nay, so poor were they, that they had not wherewithal to hire workmen, but must leave their studies, and work for themselves; no, nor to buy tools, but must borrow of their neighbours. Poverty then is no bar to prophecy.

4. They were industrious men, and willing to take pains, desired not to live like idle drones, (idle monks I might have said) upon the labours of others, but only desired leave of their president to work for themselves. As the sons of the prophets must not be so taken up with contemplation, as to render themselves unfit for action; so much less must they indulge themselves in their ease, as to be averse to labour. — He that must eat or die, must work or starve, *2 Thess. iii. 8, 10.* Let no man think an honest employment either a burthen or a disparagement.

5. They were men that had a great value and veneration for Elisha; though they were themselves prophets, they paid a mighty deference to him. 1. They would not go about to build at all without his leave, *ver. 2.* It is good for us all to be suspicious of our own judgment, even when we think we have most reason for it, and to be desirous of the advice of those who are wiser and more experienced; and it is especially commendable in the sons of the prophets, to take their fathers along with them, and to act in all things of moment under their conduct, *permissu superiorum.* 2. They would not willingly go fell timber without his company: *Go with thy servants,* *ver. 3.* not only to advise us in any exigence, but to keep good order among us, that being under thine eye, we may carry our selves as becomes us. Good disciples desire to be always under good discipline.

6. They were honest men, and men that were in care to give all men their own. When one of them accidentally fetching too fierce a stroke, (as those that work seldom, are apt to be violent) threw off his ax-head into the water, he did not say, it was a mischance, and who can help it? It was the fault of the helve, and the owner deserves to stand to the loss, but cries out with a mighty concern, *Alas, master, for it was borrowed,* *ver. 5.* Had the ax been his own, it would only have troubled him, that he could not be farther serviceable to his brethren; but now, besides that, it troubles him that he cannot be just to the owner, to whom he ought to be not only just but grateful. Note, We ought to be as careful of that which is borrowed, as of that which is our own, that it receive no damage, because we must love our neighbour as our selves, and do as we would be done by. It is likely, this prophet was poor, and had not wherewithal to pay for the ax, which made the loss of it so much the greater trouble. To those that bear an honest mind, the forest grievance of poverty is not so much their own want and disgrace, as their being by it rendered unable to pay their just debts.

2. Concerning the father of the prophets, Elisha.

(1.) That he was a man of great condescension and compassion: He went with the sons of the prophets to the woods, when they desired his company, *ver. 3.* Let no man, especially no minister, think himself too great to stoop to do good, but be tender to all.

2. That he was a man of great power, he could make iron to swim, contrary to its nature, *ver. 6.* for the God of nature is not tied up to its laws. He did not throw the helve after the hatchet, but cut down a new stick, and cast it into the river; we need not double the miracle, by supposing, that the stick sunk to fetch up the iron, it was enough, that it was a signal of the divine summons to the iron to rise. God's grace can thus raise the stony iron heart, which is sunk into the mud of the world, and raise up affections naturally earthly to things above.

8. ¶ Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place *shall be* my camp. 9. And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down. 10. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him, and warned him

No. 27.

of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice. 11. Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing, and he called his servants and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us *is* for the king of Israel? 12. And one of his servants said, None, my lord O king: but Elisha the prophet, that *is* in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou spakest in thy bed-chamber.

Here we have Elisha, with his Spirit of prophecy, serving the king, as before helping the sons of the prophets; for that, as other gifts, is given to every man to profit withal; and whatever abilities any man has of doing good, he is by them made a debtor both to the wife and unwife. Observe here,

1. How the king of Israel was informed by Elisha of all the designs and motions of his enemy, the king of Syria, more effectually than he could have been by the most vigilant and faithful spies. If the king of Syria in a secret council of war determined in what place to make an inroad upon the coasts of Israel, where he thought it would be the greatest surprise, and they would be least able to make resistance, before his forces could receive his orders, the king of Israel had notice of them from Elisha, and so had opportunity of preventing the mischief; and this many a time, *ver. 8, 9, 10.* See here, (1.) That the enemies of God's Israel are politick in their devices, and restless in their attempts against him. *They shall not know, nor see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them,* *Neh. iv. 11.* (2.) All those devices are known to God, even those that are deepest laid. He knows not only what men do, but what they design, and has many ways of countermining them. (3.) It is a great advantage to us to be warned of our danger, that we may stand upon our guard against it. The work of God's prophets is to give us warning; if being warned, we do not save our selves, it is our own fault, and our blood will be upon our own head. The king of Israel would regard the warnings Elisha gave him of his danger by the Syrians, but not the warnings he gave him of his danger by his sins: Those are little heeded by the most, that will save themselves from death, but not from hell.

2. How the king of Syria repented this. He suspected treachery among his senators, and that his counsels were betrayed, *ver. 11.* But one of his servants, that had heard by Naaman and others of Elisha's wondrous works, concludes it must needs be he that gave this intelligence to the king of Israel, *ver. 12.* What could not he discover, who could tell Gehazi his thought? Here a confession of the boundless knowledge, as before of the boundless power of Israel's God, is extorted from Syrians. Nothing done, said, thought by any person, in any place, at any time, is out of the reach of God's cognizance.

13. ¶ And he said, Go, spy where he *is*, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, *he is* in Dothan. 14. Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. 15. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city, both with horses and chariots: and his servant said unto him, Alas my master, how shall we do? 16. And he answered, Fear not: for they that *be* with us, *are* more than they that *be* with them. 17. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw: and behold, the mountain *was* full of horses, and chariots of fire round about Elisha. 18. And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness, according to the word of Elisha. 19. ¶ And Elisha said unto them, This *is* not the way, neither *is* this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria. 20. And it came to pass when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these *men*, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw, and behold, *they were* in the midst of Samaria. 21. And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite *them*? shall I smite *them*? 22. And he answered, Thou shalt not smite *them*: wouldst thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword, and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master. 23. And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.

Here is, 1. The mighty force which the king of Syria sent to seize Elisha. He found out where he was, at Dothan, *ver. 13.* which was not far from Samaria, thither he sent a great host, which were to come upon him by night, and to bring him dead or alive, *ver. 14.* Perhaps, he had heard, that when only one captain and his fifty men were sent to take Elijah, they were baffled in the attempt, and therefore he sent an army against Elisha, as if the fire from heaven that consumed fifty men, could not as easily consume fifty thousand. Naaman could tell him that Elisha dwelt not in any strong hold, nor was attended with any guards, nor had any such great interest in the people, that he needed fear a tumult among them; what occasion then was there for this great force? But thus he hoped to make him sure, especially coming upon him by surprise. Foolish man! Did he believe that Elisha had informed the king of Israel of his secret counsels or not? If not, what quarrel had he with him? If he did, could he be so weak as to imagine that he would not discover the designs laid against himself? and that having interest enough in heaven to discover them, he would not have interest enough to defeat them? Those that fight against God, his people and prophets, know not what they do.

2. The grievous fright which the prophet's servant was in, when he perceived the city surrounded by the Syrians, and the effectual course which the prophet took to pacify him, and free him from his fears. It seems, Elisha used his servant to rise early, that is the way to bring something to pass, and to do the work of a day in its day. Being up, we may suppose he heard the noise of soldiers, and thereupon looked out, and was aware of an army compassing the city, *ver. 15* with great assurance, no doubt, of success; and that they should have this troublesome prophet in their hands presently. — Now observe, (1.) What a consternation he was in; he runs straight to Elisha, to bring him an account of it, *Alas master, (saith he) what shall we do?* we are undone: it is to no purpose to think either of fighting or flying, but we must unavoidably fall into their hands. Had he but studied David's Psalms, which were then extant, he might have learnt *not to be afraid of ten thousands of people*, *Psal. iii. 6.* no not of an host encamped against him, *Psal. xxvii. 3.* Had he considered, that he was embarked with his master, by whom God had done great things, and whom he would not now leave to fall into the hands of the uncircumcised, and who having saved others, himself, no doubt, would save, he had not been thus at a loss. If he had only said, *what shall I do?* it had been more excusable, and like that of the disciples, *Lord, save us, we perish;* but he needed not to put his master in as in distress, nor to say, *what shall we do?* (2.) How his master quieted him, 1. By word: what he said to him, *ver. 16.* is spoken to all the faithful servants of God, when *without are fightings and within are fears, fear not,* with that fear which has torment and amazement, *for they that be with us, to protect us, are more than they that be against us,* to destroy us; angels, unspeakably more numerous; God, infinitely more powerful: When we are magnifying the causes of our fear, we ought to possess our selves with clear, and great, and high thoughts of God, and the invisible world. *If God be for us, we know what follows, Rom. viii. 31.* 2. By vision, *ver. 17.* (1.) It seems, Elisha was much concerned for the satisfaction of his servant. Good men desire, not only to be easy themselves, but to have those about them easy; Elisha had lately parted with his old man, and this was newly come into his service, and therefore not having the advantage of experience, his master was desirous to give him other convincing evidence of that omnipotence which employed him, and was therefore employed for him. Note, They whose faith is strong, ought tenderly to consider and compassionate those who are weak and of a timorous spirit, and to do what they can to strengthen their hands. (2.) He saw himself safe, and wished no more, but that his servant might see what he saw, a guard of angels round about him, such as were his master's convoy to the gates of heaven, were his protectors against the gates of hell. *Chariots of fire, and horses of fire;* fire is both dreadful and devouring; that power, which was engaged for Elisha's protection, could both terrify and consume the assailants; as angels are God's messengers, so they are his soldiers, his hosts, *Gen. xxxii. 2.* his legions or regiments, *Matt. xxvi. 35.* for the good of his people. (3.) For the satisfaction of his servant, there needed no more but the opening of his eyes, that therefore he prayed for, and obtained for him, *Lord, open his eyes that he may see;* the eyes of his body were open, and with them he saw the danger, Lord, open the eyes of his faith, that with them he may see the protection we are under. Note, 1. The greatest kindness we can do for those that are fearful and faint-hearted, is to pray for them, and so to recommend them to the mighty grace of God. 2. The opening of our eyes will be the silencing of our fears, in the dark we are most apt to be frightened; the clearer light we have of the sovereignty and power of heaven, the less we shall fear the calamities of this earth.

3. The shameful defeat which Elisha gave to the host of Syrians which came to seize him; they thought to make a prey of

him, but he made fools of them, perfectly played with them, so far was he from fearing them, or any damage by them.

(1.) He prayed to God to smite them with blindness, and they were all struck blind immediately, not stark blind, nor so as to be themselves aware that they were blind, for they could see the light, but their sight was so altered, that they could not know the persons and places they were before acquainted with, *ver. 18.* they were so confounded, that those among them, whom they depended upon for information, did not know this place to be Dothan, nor this person to be Elisha, but *groped at noon-day as in the night*, *Isa. lix. 10.* *Job xii. 24, 25.* their memory failed them, and their distinguishing faculty; see the power of God over the minds and understandings of men both ways, he enlightned the eyes of Elisha's friend, and darkned the eyes of his foes, that they might see indeed but not perceive, *Isa. vi. 9.* For this twofold judgment Christ came into this world, *that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind*, *John ix. 39.* a favour of life to some, of death to others.

(2.) When they were thus bewildered and confounded, he led them to Samaria, *ver. 19.* promising that he would shew them the man whom they sought, and did so; he did not lie to them, when he told them, *this is not the way, nor is this the city* where Elisha is, for he was now come out of the city; and if they would see him, they must go to another city which he would direct them to; they that fight against God and his prophets, deceive themselves, and are justly given up to delusions.

(3.) When he had brought them to Samaria, he prayed to God so to open their eyes, and restore them their memories, that they might see where they were, *ver. 20.* and behold, to their great terror, *they were in the midst of Samaria*, where, it is probable, there was a standing force sufficient to cut them all off, or make them prisoners of war; Satan, the god of this world, blinds mens eyes, and so deludes them into their own ruin, but when God enlightens their eyes, they then see themselves in the midst of their enemies, captives to Satan, and in danger of hell, though before they thought their condition good. — The enemies of God and his church, when they fancy themselves ready to triumph, will find themselves conquered and triumphed over.

(4.) When he had them at his mercy, he made it appear, that he was acted by a divine goodness as well as a divine power.

1. He took care to protect them from the danger into which he had brought them, and was content to shew them what he could have done; he needed not the sword of an angel to revenge his cause, the sword of the king of Israel is at his service if he pleaseth, *ver. 21.* *My father,* (so respectfully doth he now speak to him, though soon after he swore his death) *shall I smite them?* and again, as if his fingers itched to be at them, *shall I smite them?* Perhaps, he remembered how God was displeased at his father, for letting go out of his hands those whom he had put it into his power to destroy, and he would not offend in like manner, yet such a reverence has he for the prophet, that he will not strike a stroke without his commission; but the prophet would by no means suffer him to meddle with them, they were brought hither to be convinced and shamed, not to be killed, *ver. 22.* Had they been his prisoners, taken captive by his sword and bow, when they had asked quarter, it had been barbarous to deny, and when he had given it them, it had been perfidious to do them any hurt, and against the law of arms to kill men in cool blood; but they were not his prisoners, they were God's prisoners and the prophet's, and therefore he must do them no harm; they that humble themselves under God's hand, take the best course to secure themselves.

2. He took care to provide for them, ordered the king to treat them handsomely, and then dismiss them fairly, which he did, *ver. 23.* (1.) It was the king's praise that he was so obsequious to the prophet, contrary to his inclination, and, as it seemed, to his interest, 1 *Sam. xxiv. 19.* nay, so willing was he to oblige Elisha, that whereas he was ordered only to set bread and water before them, (and that is good fare for captives) he prepared great provision for them, for the credit of his court and country, and of Elisha. — (2.) It was the prophet's praise, that he was so generous to his enemies, who, though they came to take him, could not but go away taken with him, as both the mightiest and the kindest man they ever met with; the great duty of loving enemies, and doing good to those that hate us, was both commanded in the Old Testament, *Prov. xxv. 21, 22.* *If thine enemy hunger, feed him*, *Exod. xxiii. 4, 5.* and practised, as here by Elisha; his predecessor had given a specimen of divine justice, when he called for flames of fire on the heads of his persecutors to consume them, but he gave a specimen of divine mercy, in heaping coals of fire on the heads of his persecutors to melt them; let not us then be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Lastly, the good effect this had for the present upon the Syrians, they came no more into the land of Israel, *ver. 23.* viz. upon this errand, to take Elisha, they saw it was to no purpose to attempt

attempt that, nor would any of their bands be persuaded to make an assault on so great and good a man; the most glorious victory over an enemy is to turn him into a friend.

24. ¶ And it came to pass after this, that Ben-hadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. 25. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of doves dung for five pieces of silver. 26. And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king. 27. And he said, If the LORD do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barn-floor, or out of the wine-press? 28. And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow. 29. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son. 30. ¶ And it came to pass when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes, and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and behold, he had sackcloth within, upon his flesh. 31. Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day. 32. But Elisha sat in his house (and the elders sat with him) and the king sent a man from before him: but ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head? look when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door: is not the sound of his masters feet behind him? 33. And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came down unto him: and he said, Behold, this evil is of the LORD, what should I wait for the LORD any longer?

This last paragraph of this chapter should of right have been the first of the next chapter, for it begins a new story, which is there continued and concluded.

Here is, 1. The siege which the king of Syria laid to Samaria, and the great distress which the city was reduced to thereby; the Syrians had soon forgot the kindnesses they had lately received in Samaria, and very ungratefully, for ought appears, without any provocation, seek the destruction of it, *ver. 24.* These are base spirits that can never be obliged; the country we may suppose plundered and laid waste, when this capital city was brought to the last extremity, *ver. 25.* The dearth which had of late been in the land was probably the occasion of the emptiness of their stores, or the siege was so sudden that they had not time to lay in provisions, so that while the sword devoured without, the famine within was more grievous, *Lam. iv. 9.* for, it should seem, the Syrians designed not to storm the city, but to starve it; so great was the scarcity, that an ass's head, that has but little flesh on it, and that unsavoury, unwholesome, and ceremonially unclean, was sold for five pound, and a small quantity of fitches, or lentils, or some such coarse corn, then called doves dung, no more of it than the quantity of six eggs, for five pieces of silver, about twelve or fifteen shillings.—Learn to value plenty, and to be thankful for it; see how contemptible money is, when in time of famine it is so freely parted with for any thing that is eatable.

2. The sad complaint which a poor woman had to make to the king in the extremity of the famine; he was passing by upon the wall to give orders for the mounting of the guard, the posting of the archers, the repair of the breaches, and the like, when a woman of the city cried to him, *Help, my lord, O king, ver. 26.* Whither should the subject in distress go for help but to the prince, who is by office the protector of right and the avenger of wrong?—He returns but a melancholy answer, *ver. 27.* *If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I?* Some think it was a quarrelling word, and the language of his fretfulness; why dost thou expect any thing from me, when God himself deals thus hardly with us? Because he could not help her as he would, out of the floor or the wine-press, he would not help her at all; we must take heed of being made cross by cross providences. It rather seems to be a quieting word, let us be content, and make the best of our affliction, looking up to God, for till he help us I cannot help thee. (1.) He laments the emptiness of the floor and the wine-press, those were not as they had been, even the king's failed; we read *ver. 23.* of great provisions which he had at command, sufficient for the entertainment of an army, yet now he has not wherewithal to relieve one poor woman; scarcity sometimes follows upon great plenty, we cannot be sure that *to morrow shall be as this day*, *Psal. xxx. 6.* (2.) He acknowledgeth himself thereby disabled to help, unless God would help them. Note, Creatures

are helpless things without God, for every creature is that, all that, and only that which he makes it to be.—However, though he cannot help her, he is willing to hear her, *ver. 28.* *What aileth thee?* Is there any thing singular in thy case, or dost thou fare worse than thy neighbours? Truly yes, she and one of her neighbours had made a barbarous agreement, that all provisions failing, they should boil and eat her son first, and then her neighbour's, hers was eaten, (who can think of it without horror?) and now her neighbour hid hers, *ver. 28, 29.* See an instance of the dominion which the flesh has got above the spirit, when the most natural affections of the mind may be thus overpowered by the natural appetites of the body, see the word of God fulfilled; among the threatnings of God's judgments upon Israel for their sins this was one, *Deut. xxviii. 53—57.* That they should eat the flesh of their own children, which one would think incredible, yet it came to pass.

3. The king's indignation against Elisha upon this occasion; he lamented the calamity, *rent his clothes, and had sackcloth upon his flesh, ver. 30.* as one heartily concerned for the misery of his people, and that it was not in his power to help them; but he laments not his own iniquity, nor the iniquity of his people, which was the procuring cause of the calamity; is not sensible that his ways and his doings have procured this to himself, this is his wickedness, for it is bitter; the foolishness of man perverts his way, and then his heart frets against the Lord; instead of vowing to pull down the calves at Dan and Beth-el, or letting the law have its course against the prophets of Baal, and of the groves, he swears the death of Elisha, *ver. 31.* Why, what is the matter? what has Elisha done? his head is the most innocent and valuable in all Israel, and yet that must be devoted and made an anathema; thus in the days of the persecuting emperors, when the empire groaned under any extraordinary calamity, the fault was laid on the christians, and they were doomed to destruction, *Christianos ad leones*; perhaps Jehoram was in this heat against Elisha, because he had foretold this judgment, or had persuaded him to hold out, and not surrender, or rather because he did not by his prayers raise the siege, and relieve the city, which he thought he could do, but would not; whereas till they repented and reformed, and were ready for deliverance, they had no reason to expect that the prophet should pray for it.

4. The foresight Elisha had of the king's design against him, *ver. 32.* he sat in his house well composed, and the elders with him well employed, no doubt, while the king was like a wild bull in a net, or like the troubled sea when it cannot rest; he told the elders there was an officer coming from the king to cut off his head, and bid them stop him at the door, and not let him in, for the king his master was just following him, to revoke the order as we may suppose; the same Spirit of prophecy that enabled Elisha to tell what was done at a distance, authorized him to call the king the son of a murderer, which, unless we could produce such an extraordinary commission, it is not for us to imitate; far be it from us to despise dominion, and to speak evil of dignities.—He appeals to the elders whether he had deserved so ill at the king's hands, see whether in this he be not the son of a murderer? For what evil had Elisha done? He had not desired the woful day, *Jer. xvii. 16.*

5. The king's passionate speech, when he came to prevent the execution of his edict for the beheading of Elisha; he seems to have been in a struggle between his convictions and his corruptions; knew not what to say, but seeing things brought to the last extremity, he even abandons himself to despair, *ver. 33.* *This evil is of the Lord,* therein his notions were right, and well applied; it is a general truth that all penal evil is of the Lord, as the first cause, and sovereign judge, *Amos iii. 6.* and this we ought to apply to particular cases, if all evil, then this evil, whatever it is we are now groaning under, whoever are the instruments, God is the principal agent; but his inference from this truth was foolish and wicked, *What should I wait for the Lord any longer?* When Eli, and David, and Job said, *it is of the Lord,* they grew patient upon it, but this bad man grew outrageous upon it, I will neither fear worse, for worse cannot, nor expect better, for better never will come; we are all undone, and there is no remedy. It is an unreasonable thing to be weary of waiting for God, for he is a God of judgment, and blessed are all they that wait for him.

C H A P. VII.

Relief is here brought to Samaria and her king, when the case was in a manner desperate, and the king despairing. (1.) It is foretold by Elisha, and an unbelieving lord shut out from the benefit of it, *ver. 1, 2.* (2.) It is brought about, 1. By an unaccountable fright which God put the Syrians into, *ver. 6.* which drove them to their heels, *ver. 7.* 2. By the seasonable discovery which four lepers made of this, *ver. 3—5.* and the account they gave of it to the court, *ver. 8—11.* 3. By the cautious trial which the king made of the truth of it, *ver. 12—15.* Lastly, the event answered the prediction both in the sudden plenty, *ver. 16.* and the death of the unbelieving lord, *ver. 17—20.* for no word of God shall fall to the ground.

1. **T**HEN Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD, Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time *shall* a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria. 2. Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned, answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

Here, 1. Elisha foretels that notwithstanding the great straits that the city of Samaria was reduced to, within twenty four hours they should have plenty, *ver.* 1. The king of Israel despaired of it, and grew weary of waiting, then Elisha said this, then, when things were at the worst; man's extremity is God's opportunity of magnifying his own power, his time to appear for his people is when *their strength is gone*, Deut. xxxii. 36. Then, when they had given over expecting help, it came: *When the son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?* Luke xviii. 8.—The king said, *what should I wait for the Lord any longer?* And perhaps some of the elders were ready to say the same; well, saith Elisha, you hear what these say, *now hear ye the word of the Lord*, hear what he saith, hear it and heed it, hear it and believe it; to morrow corn shall be sold at the usual rate in the gate of Samaria, that is, (1.) The siege shall be raised, for the gate of the city shall be opened, and the market shall be held there as formerly; the return of peace is thus expressed, *Jud.* v. 11. *Then shall the people of the Lord go down to the gates, to buy and sell there.* (2.) The consequence of that shall be great plenty, this would in time follow of course, but that corn should be thus cheap in so short a time, was quite beyond what could be thought of; though the king of Israel had just now threatened Elijah's life, God promises to save his life and the life of his people, for *where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound.*

2. A peer of Israel, that happened to be present, openly declared his disbelief of this prediction, *ver.* 2. He was a courtier, whom the king had an affection for, as the man of his right hand, on whom he leaned, *i. e.* on whose prudence he much relied, and in whom he reposed a mighty confidence; he thought it impossible, unless God should rain corn out of the clouds, as once he did manna; no less than the repetition of Moses's miracle will serve him, though that of Elijah might serve to answer this intention, the increasing of the meal in the barrel.

3. The just doom past upon him for his infidelity, that he should see this great plenty for his conviction, and yet not eat of it to his comfort. Note, Unbelief is a sin by which men greatly dishonour and displease God, and deprive themselves of the favours he designed for them; the murmuring Israelites saw Canaan, but could not enter in because of unbelief; such (saith bishop Patrick) will be the portion of those that believe not the promise of eternal life, they shall see it at a distance, Abraham afar off, but shall never taste of it; for they forfeit the benefit of the promise, if they cannot find in their heart to take God's word.

3. ¶ And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? 4. If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die. 5. And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, *there was* no man there. 6. For the LORD had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, *even* the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. 7. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, *even* the camp as it was, and fled for their life. 8. And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence *also*, and went and hid it. 9. Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning-light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household. 10. So they came, and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them

saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and behold, *there was* no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were. 11. And he called the porters, and they told it to the king's house within.

We are here told,

1. How the siege of Samaria was raised in the evening, at the edge of night, *ver.* 6, 7. not by might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts, striking terror upon the spirits of the besiegers; here was not a sword drawn against them, not a drop of blood shed, it was not by thunder or hailstones that they were discomfited, nor were they slain as Sennacherib's army before Jerusalem by a destroying angel, but, (1.) *The Lord made them to hear a noise of chariots and horses*; the Syrians that besieged Dothan had their sight imposed upon, *chap.* vi. 18. these had their hearing imposed upon, for God knows how to work upon every sense pursuant to his own counsels; as *he makes the hearing ear, and the seeing eye*, so he makes *the deaf and the blind*, *Exod.* iv. 11.—Whether the noise was really made in the air by the ministry of angels, or whether it was only a sound in their ears, is not certain; which soever it was, it was from God, who both *brings the wind out of his treasures*, and *fermeth the spirit of man within him*; the sight of horses and chariots had encouraged the prophet's servant, *chap.* vi. 17. The noise of horses and chariots terrified the hosts of Syria, for notices from the invisible world are either very comfortable or very dreadful, according as men are at peace with God or at war with him.

(2.) Hearing this noise, they concluded the king of Israel had certainly procured assistance from some foreign power, he has *hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians*; there was, for ought we know, but one king of Egypt, and what kings there were of the Hittites no body can imagine; but as they were imposed upon by that dreadful sound in their ears, so they imposed upon themselves by the interpretation they made of it; had they supposed the king of Judah to have come with his forces, there had been more of probability in it, than to dream of the *kings of the Hittites and the Egyptians*; if the fancies of any of them raised this spectre, yet their reasons might soon have laid it; how could the king of Israel, who was closely besieged, hold intelligence with those distant princes? What had he to hire them with? It was impossible but some notice would come before of the motions of so great an host; but *there were they in great fear, where no fear was.*

(3.) Hereupon they all fled with incredible precipitation, as for their lives, left their camp as it was, and even their horses, that might have hastened their flight, they could not stay to take with them, *ver.* 7. none of them had so much sense as to send out scouts to discover the supposed enemy, much less courage enough to face the enemy, though fatigued with a long march; *the wicked flee when none pursues*; God can, when he pleaseth, dispirit the boldest and most brave, and make the stoutest heart to tremble; they that will not fear God, he can make them fear at the shaking of a leaf.

2. How the Syrians flight was discovered by four leprous men; Samaria is delivered, and doth not know it; the watchmen on the walls were not aware of the retreat of the enemy, so silently did they steal away, but providence employs four lepers to be the intelligencers, who had their lodging without the gate, being excluded the city, as ceremonially unclean; the Jews say they were Gehazi and his three sons: perhaps Gehazi might be one of them, which might make him taken notice of afterwards by the king, *chap.* viii. 4. See here,

1. How these lepers reasoned themselves into a resolution to make a visit in the night to the camp of the Syrians, *ver.* 3, 4. They were ready to perish for hunger, none passed through the gate to relieve them; should they go into the city, there was nothing to be had there, they must die in the streets; should they sit still, they must pine to death in their cottage: they therefore determine to go over to the enemy, and throw themselves upon their mercy; if they killed them, better die by the sword than by famine, one death than a thousand; but perhaps they would save them alive, as objects of compassion; common prudence will put us upon that method which may mend our condition, but cannot make it worse.—The prodigal son resolves to return to his father, whose displeasure he had reason to fear, rather than perish with hunger in the far country.—These lepers conclude, if they kill us we shall but die, and happy they who in another sense can thus speak of dying; we shall but die, that is the worst of it, not die and be damned, not be hurt of the second death.—According to this resolution, they went in the beginning of the night to the camp of the Syrians, and, to their great surprize, found it wholly deserted, not a man to be seen or heard in it, *ver.* 5. Providence ordered it, that these lepers came as soon as ever the Syrians were fled, for they fled in the twilight, (the evening twilight) *ver.* 7. and in the twilight the lepers came, *ver.* 5. and so no time was lost.

2. How they reasoned themselves into a resolution to bring tidings of this to the city; they filled their bellies in the first tent they came to, *ver.* 8. and then began to think of enriching them-

themselves with the plunder; but they correct themselves, *ver.* 9. *We do not do well*, to conceal those good tidings from the community we are members of, under colour of being revenged upon them for excluding us their society; it was the law that did it, not they, and therefore let us bring them the news, though it wake them from sleep, it will be *life from the dead* to them: their own consciences told them that some mischief would befall them if they acted separately, and fought themselves only; selfish narrow-spirited people cannot expect to prosper, the most comfortable prosperity is that which our brethren share with us in.—According to this resolution, they returned to the gate, and acquainted the centinel with what they had discovered, *ver.* 10. who straightway brought the intelligence to court, *ver.* 11. and it was never the less acceptable for being first brought by lepers.

12. ¶ And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants, I will now shew you what the Syrians have done to us: they know that we *be* hungry, therefore are they gone out of the camp, to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city. 13. And one of his servants answered and said, Let *some* take, I pray thee, five of the horses that remain, which are left in the city (behold, they *are* as all the multitude of Israel that are left in it: behold, *I say*, they *are* even as all the multitude of the Israelites that are consumed) and let us send and see. 14. They took therefore two chariot-horses, and the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying, Go and see. 15. And they went after them unto Jordan, and lo, all the way *was* full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste: and the messengers returned and told the king. 16. And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was *sold* for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD. 17. ¶ And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned, to have the charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said, who spake when the king came down to him. 18. And it came to pass as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, Two measures of barley for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour, for a shekel, shall be to morrow about this time in the gate of Samaria: 19. And that lord answered the man of God, and said, Now behold, *if* the LORD should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof. 20. And so it fell out unto him for the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died.

Here is, 1. The king's jealousy of a stratagem in the Syrians retreat, *ver.* 12. he feared they withdrew into an ambush, to draw out the besieged, that they might fall on them with the more advantage; he knew he had no reason to expect that God should appear thus wonderfully for him, having forfeited his favour by his unbelief and impatience: he knew no reason the Syrians had to fly, for it doth not appear that he or any of his attendants heard the noise of the chariots which the Syrians were frightened at; those who, like him, are *unstable in all their ways*, let them not *think to receive any thing from God*; nay, a guilty conscience fears the worst, and makes men suspicious.

2. The course they took for their satisfaction, and to prevent their falling into a snare; they sent out spies to see what was become of the Syrians, and found they were all fled indeed, commanders as well as common soldiers; they could track them by the garments which they threw off, and left by the way, for their greater expedition, *ver.* 15. He that gave this advice seems very sensible of the deplorable condition the people were in, *ver.* 13. for, speaking of the horses that were many of them dead, and the rest ready to perish for hunger, he saith, and repeats it, *They are as all the multitude of Israel*: Israel used to glory in their multitude, but now they are diminished and brought low; he advised to send five horsemen, but it should seem there were only two fit to be sent, and those chariot-horses, *ver.* 14. Now the Lord repented himself concerning his servants, when he saw that their strength was gone, *Deut.* xxxii. 36.

3. The plenty that was in Samaria from the plunder of the camp of the Syrians, *ver.* 16. Had the Syrians been governed by the modern policies of war, when they could not take their bag and baggage and their tents with them, they would rather have burnt them, (as it is common to do with the forage of a country) than let them fall into their enemies hands; but God intended that the besieging of Samaria, which was intended for its ruin, should turn to its advantage, and that Israel should now be enriched with the spoil of the Syrians, as of old with those of the Egyptians.—Here see, (1.) *The wealth of the sinner laid*

up for the just, Job xxvii. 16, 17. and the spoilers spoiled, *Isa.* xxxiii. 1. (2.) The wants of Israel supplied in a way that they little thought of, which should encourage us to depend upon the power and goodness of God in our greatest straits. (3.) The word of Elisha fulfilled to a tittle, *a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel*; they that spoiled the camp had not only enough to supply themselves with, but an overplus to sell at an easy rate for the benefit of others, and so even *they that tarried at home did divide the spoil*, *Psal.* lxxviii. 12. *Isa.* xxxiii. 23. God's promise may be safely relied on, for no word of his shall fall to the ground.

4. The death of the unbelieving courtier, that questioned the truth of Elisha's word; divine threatenings will as surely be accomplished as divine promises; *he that believeth not shall be damned*, stands as firm as *he that believeth shall be saved*.—This lord, (1.) Was preferred by the king to the *charge of the gate*, *ver.* 17. to keep the peace, and to see that there was no tumult or disorder in dividing and disposing of the spoil; so much trust did the king repose in him, and in his prudence and gravity, and so much did he delight to honour him; he that will be great, let him serve the publick. (2.) Was trodden to death by the people in the gate, either by accident, the crowd being exceeding great, and he in the thickest of it, or perhaps designedly, because he abused his power, and was imperious, in restraining the people from satisfying their hunger; however it was, God's justice was glorified, and the word of Elisha was fulfilled, he saw the plenty for the silencing and shaming of his unbelief, corn cheap without *opening windows in heaven*, and therein saw his own folly in prescribing to God, but he did not eat of the plenty he saw; *when he was about to fill his belly*, God cast the fury of his wrath upon him, Job xx. 23. and it came between the cup and the lip; justly are those thus tantalized with the world's promises that think themselves tantalized with the promises of God; if believing shall not be seeing, seeing shall not be enjoying.

This matter is repeated, and the event very particularly compared with the prediction, *ver.* 18, 19, 20. that we might take special notice of it, and might learn, (1.) How heinously God resents our distrust of him, and of his power, providence, and promise; when Israel said, *Can God furnish a table?* *The Lord heard it, and was wroth*: infinite wisdom will not be limited by our folly; God never promisseth the end, but he knows where to provide the means. (2.) How uncertain life is, and the enjoyments of it; honour and power cannot secure men from sudden and inglorious deaths, he whom the king leaned upon, the people trod upon; who fancied himself the stay and support of the government, is trampled under foot as the mire in the streets; thus hath the pride of mens glory been often stained.—(3.) How certain God's threatenings are, and how sure to light on the guilty and obnoxious heads; let all men fear before the great God, who *treads upon princes as mortar*, and is terrible to the kings of the earth.

C H A P. VIII.

The passages of story recorded in this chapter oblige us to look back, (1.) *We have read before of a Shunammite woman that was a kind benefactor to Elisha, now here we are told how she fared the better for it afterwards in the advice Elisha gave her, and the favour the king shewed her for his sake*, *ver.* 1—6. (2.) *We read before of the designation of Hazael to be king of Syria*, 1 Kings xix. 15. *and here we have an account of his elevation to that throne, and the way he forced for himself to it, by killing his master*, *ver.* 7—15. (3.) *We read before of Jehoram's reigning over Judah in the room of his father Jehoshaphat*, 1 Kin. xxii. 50. *now here we have a short and sad history of his short and wicked reign*, *ver.* 16—24. *and the beginning of the history of the reign of his son Ahaziah*, *ver.* 25—29.

1. **T**HEN spake Elisha unto the woman (whose son he had restored to life) saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the LORD hath called for a famine, and it shall also come upon the land seven years. 2. And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God: and she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years. 3. And it came to pass at the seven years end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines: and she went forth to cry unto the king for her house, and for her land. 4. And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done. 5. And it came to pass as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that behold, the woman whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house, and for her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman,

and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life. 6. And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that *was* hers, and all the fruits of the field, since the day that she left the land, even till now.

Here we have,

1. The wickedness of Israel punished with a long famine, one of God's sore judgments oft threatened in the law; *Canaan*, that fruitful land, is turned into barrenness, for the iniquity of them that dwell therein. — The famine in Samaria was soon relieved, by the raising of the siege, but neither that judgment nor that mercy had a due influence upon them, and therefore *the Lord calls for another famine*, for when he judgeth, he will overcome; if lesser judgments do not prevail to bring men to repentance, he will send greater and longer; they are at his beck, and will come when he calls for them. — He doth by his ministers call for reformation and obedience, and if those calls be not regarded, we may expect he will call for some plague or other, for he will be heard; this famine continued seven years, as long again as that in Elijah's time, for if men will walk contrary to him he will heat the furnace yet hotter.

2. The kindness of the good Shunammite to the prophet rewarded, by the care that was taken of her in that famine; she was not indeed fed by miracle, as the widow of Sarepta was, but, (1.) She had notice given her of this famine before it came, that she might provide accordingly, and was directed to remove to some other country, any where but in Israel she would find plenty; it was a great advantage to Egypt in Joseph's time that they had notice of the famine before it came, so it was to this Shunammite, others would be forced to remove at last, after they had long born the grievances of the famine, and had wasted their substance, and could not settle elsewhere upon such good terms as she might that went early, before the crowd, and took her stock with her unbroken; it is our happiness to foresee an evil, and our wisdom, when we foresee it, to hide our selves. — (2.) Providence gave her a comfortable settlement in *the land of the Philistines*, who, though subdued by David, yet were not wholly rooted out; it seems the famine was peculiar to the land of Israel, and other countries that joined close to them had plenty at the same time, which plainly shewed the immediate hand of God in it, as in the plagues of Egypt, when they distinguished between the Israelites and the Egyptians, and that the sins of Israel, against whom this judgment was directly levelled, were more provoking to God than the sins of their neighbours, because of their profession of relation to God; *You only have I known, therefore will I punish you*, Amos iii. 2. Other countries had rain when they had none, were free from locusts and caterpillars when they were eaten up with them, for some think this was the famine spoken of, *Joel* i. 3, 4. — It is strange that when there was plenty in the neighbouring countries, there were not those that made it their business to import corn into the land of Israel, which might have prevented the inhabitants removing, but as they were befooled with their idolatries, so they were infatuated even in the matters of their civil interest. —

3. Her petition to the king at her return, favoured by the reasonableness of her application to him.

1. When the famine was over, she returned out of the land of the Philistines, that was no proper place for an Israelite any longer than there was necessity for it, for there she could not keep her new-moons and her sabbaths as she used to do in her own country, among the schools of the prophets, *chap. iv. 23*.

2. At her return she found herself kept out of the possession of her own estate, it being either confiscated to the exchequer, seized by the lord, or usurped in her absence by some of the neighbours, or perhaps the person she had intrusted with the management of it, proved false, and would neither resign it to her, nor come to an account with her for the mesn profits; so hard is it to find a person that one can put a confidence in in a time of trouble, *Prov. xxv. 19. Micah vii. 5*.

3. She made her application to the king himself for redress, for it seems (be it observed to his praise) he was easy of access, and did himself take cognizance of the complaints of his injured subjects; time was when she dwelt so securely among her own people that she had no occasion to be *spoken for to the king or to the captain of the host*, *chap. iv. 13*. but now her own familiar friends, in whom she trusted, proved so unjust and unkind, that she was glad to appeal to the king against them; such uncertainty there is in the creature, that that may fail us which we most depend upon, and that befriend us which we think we shall never need.

4. She found the king talking with Gehazi about Elisha's miracles. *ver. 4*. It was his shame that he needed now to be informed concerning them, when he might have acquainted himself with them as they were done from Elisha himself, if he had not been willing to shut his eyes against the convincing evidences of his mission, yet it was his praise that he was now better disposed, and would rather talk with a leper that was capable of giving a good account of them than continue ignorant of them. — The law did not forbid

all conversation with lepers, but only dwelling with them; there being then no priests in Israel, perhaps the king, or some one appointed by him, had the inspection of lepers, and passed the judgment upon them, which might bring him acquainted with Gehazi.

5. This happy coincidence befriended both Gehazi's narrative and her petition; providence is to be acknowledged in ordering the circumstances of events, for sometimes those that are minute in themselves prove of great consequence, as this here, for,

1. It made the king ready to believe Gehazi's narrative, when it was thus confirmed by the persons most nearly concerned; *this is the woman, and this her son*, let them speak for themselves, *ver. 5*. Thus did God even force him to believe what he might have had some colour to question, if he had only had Gehazi's word for it, because he was branded for a liar, witness his leprosy.

2. It made him ready to grant her request, for who would not be ready to favour one whom heaven had thus favoured, and to support a life which was given once and again by miracle? In consideration of this, the king gave orders that her land should be restored her, and all the profits that were made of it in her absence; if it were to himself that the land and profits had escheated, it was generous and kind to make so full a restitution; he would not (as Pharaoh did in Joseph's time) enrich the crown by the calamities of his subjects; if it were by some other person that her property was invaded, it was an act of justice in the king, and part of the duty of his place, to do her right, *Psal. lxxxii. 3, 4. Prov. xxxi. 9*. It is not enough for those in authority that they do no wrong themselves, but they must support the right of those that are wronged.

7. ¶ And Elisha came to Damascus; and Ben-hadad the king of Syria was sick, and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither. 8. And the king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go meet the man of God, and enquire of the LORD by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease? 9. So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels burthen, and came and stood before him, and said, Thy son Ben-hadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease? 10. And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit, the LORD hath shewed me, that he shall surely die. 11. And he settled his countenance stedfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept. 12. And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. 13. And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The LORD hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria. 14. So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master, who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me that thou shouldst surely recover. 15. And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took a cloth, and dipt it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died: and Hazael reigned in his stead.

Here, 1. We may enquire what brought Elisha to Damascus, the chief city of Syria? Was he sent to any but to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*? It seems he was, perhaps he went to make a visit to Naaman, his convert, and to confirm him in his choice of the true religion, which was the more needful now, because it should seem he was now out of his place, for Hazael is supposed to be captain of the host; either he resigned it, or was turned out of it, because he would not bow, or not bow heartily, in the house of Rimmon; some think he went to Damascus upon account of the famine, or rather he went thither in obedience to the orders God gave Elisha, *1 Kings xix. 15. Go to Damascus to anoint Hazael, thou or thy successor*.

2. We may observe that Benhadad, a great king, rich and mighty, lay sick; no honour, wealth or power will secure men from the common diseases and disasters of human life; palaces and thrones lie as open to the arrests of sickness and death as the meanest cottage.

3. We may wonder that the king of Syria, in his sickness, should make Elisha his oracle; notice was soon brought him that *the man of God*, (for by that title he was well known in Syria since he cured Naaman) was come to Damascus, *ver. 7*. Never in better time, saith Benhadad, *Go, and enquire of the Lord by him*; in his health he bowed in the house of Rimmon, but now he is sick, he is sick of his idol, and sends to enquire of the God of Israel; affliction brings those to God, who in their prosperity had

had made light of him; sometimes sickness opens mens eyes, and rectifies their mistakes. — This is the more observable, (1.) Because it is not long since a king of Israel had in his sickness sent to enquire of the God of Ekron, *chap. i. 2.* as if there had been no God in Israel. Note, God sometimes fetcheth to himself that honour from strangers, which is denied him, and alienated from him by his own professing people. — (2.) Because it is not long since this Benhadad had sent a great force to treat Elisha as an enemy, *chap. vi. 14.* yet now he courts him as a prophet. Note, Among other instances of the change of mens minds by sickness and affliction, this is one, that it often gives them other thoughts of God's ministers, and teacheth them to value the counsels and prayers of those whom they had hated and despised.

To put an honour upon the prophet, 1. He sends to him, and doth not send for him, as if, with the centurion, he thought himself not worthy that the man of God should come under his roof. 2. He sends to him by Hazael, his prime minister of state; and not by a common messenger; it is no disparagement to the greatest of men to attend the prophets of the Lord; Hazael must go meet him at the place where he had appointed a meeting with his friends. 3. He sends him a noble present, of every good thing of Damascus, as much as loaded forty camels, *ver. 9.* testifying hereby his affection to the prophet and bidding him welcome to Damascus, and providing for his sustenance while he sojourned there; it is probable Elisha accepted it; why should he not? though he refused Naaman's. 4. He orders Hazael to call him his son Ben-hadad, conforming to the language of Israel, who called the prophets fathers. Lastly, He put an honour upon him as one acquainted with the secrets of heaven, when he enquired of him, *Shall I recover?* It is natural to us, to desire to know things to come in time, while things to come in eternity are little thought of or enquired after.

4. What past between Hazael and Elisha is especially remarkable. (1.) Elisha answered his enquiry concerning the king, that he might recover, the disease was not mortal, but that he should die another way, *ver. 10.* not a natural, but a violent death; there are many ways out of the world, and sometimes, while men think to avoid one, they fall by another. (2.) He looked Hazael in the face with an unusual concern, till he made Hazael blush, and himself weep, *ver. 11.* The man of God could outface the man of war. — It was not in Hazael's countenance that Elisha read what he would do, but God did at this time reveal it to him, and it fetched tears from his eyes; the more foresight men have, the more grief they are liable to. (3.) When Hazael asked him why he wept, he told him what a great deal of mischief he foresaw he would do to the Israel of God, *ver. 12.* what desolations he would make of their strongholds, and barbarous destruction of their men, women, and children; the sins of Israel provoked God to give them up into the hands of their cruel enemies, yet Elisha wept to think that ever Israelites should be thus abused, for though he foretold, he did not desire the woful day; see what havock war makes, what havock sin makes, and how the nature of man is changed by the fall, and strip even of humanity itself. (4.) Hazael is mightily surprised at this prediction, *ver. 13.* *What, saith he, Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* This great thing he looks upon to be, 1. An act of great power, not to be done but by a crowned head; it must be some mighty potentate that can think to prevail thus against Israel, and therefore not I; many are raised to that dominion which they never thought of, and it proves it may be to their own hurt, *Eccles. viii. 9.* — 2. An act of great barbarity, which could not be done but by one lost to all honour and virtue, therefore, saith he, it is what I shall never find in my heart to be guilty of: *Is thy servant a dog, to rend and tear, and devour?* Unless I were a dog I could not do it. See here, (1.) What ill thoughts he had of the sin, he looked upon it to be great wickedness, fitter for a brute, for a beast of prey to do than a man. Note, It is possible for a wicked man, under the convictions and restraints of natural conscience, to express great abhorrence of a sin, and yet afterwards to be well reconciled to it. (2.) What good thoughts he had of himself, and better than he deserved; he thought it impossible he should do such ill-natured things as the prophet foresaw. Note, We are apt to think ourselves sufficiently armed against those sins which yet we are afterwards overcome by, as Peter, *Matt. xxvi. 35.* — Lastly, In answer to this, Elisha only told him *he should be king over Syria*, then he would have power to do it, and then he would find in his heart to do it; *Honours change mens tempers and manners*, and seldom for the better; thou knowest not what thou wilt do, when thou comest to be king, but I tell thee, this thou wilt do; those that are little and low in the world, cannot imagine how strong the temptations of power and prosperity are, which, if ever they arrive to, they will find how deceitful their hearts were, and how much worse than they suspected.

5. What mischief Hazael did to his master hereupon, which, if he took any occasion to do from what Elisha had said, the fault was on him, not on the word. —

(1.) He basely cheated his master, and belied the prophet, *ver. 14.* *He told me thou shouldst certainly recover*, this was abominably false, he told him he should die, *ver. 10.* but he unfairly and unfaithfully concealed that, either because he was loth to put the king out of humour with bad news, or because hereby he might the more effectually carry on his design against his life, which his fingers itched to be at, when he was told he should be his successor; the Devil ruins men, by telling they shall certainly recover and do well, so rocking them asleep in security, than which nothing more fatal; this was an injury to the king, who lost the benefit of this warning to prepare for death, and an injury to Elisha, who would be counted a false prophet.

(2.) He barbarously murdered his master, and so made good the prophet's word, *ver. 15.* He dipt a thick cloth in cold water, and spread that upon his face, under pretence of cooling and refreshing him, but so that it stopt his breath, and stifled him presently, he being weak, and not able to help himself, or perhaps asleep; such a bubble is the life of the greatest of men, and so much exposed are princes to violence; Hazael, that was Benhadad's confidant, is his murderer, and, some think, was not suspected, nor did it ever come out but by the pen of this inspired historian; we found this haughty monarch, *1 Kings xx. the terror of the mighty in the land of the living*, but he goes down slain to the pit with his iniquity upon his bones, *Ezek. xxxii. 25.*

16. ¶ And in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being then king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign. 17. Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. 18. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab: for the daughter of Ahab was his wife; and he did evil in the sight of the LORD. 19. Yet the LORD would not destroy Judah, for David his servants sake, as he promised him to give him alway a light, and to his children. 20. ¶ In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves. 21. So Joram went over to Zair, and all the chariots with him, and he rose by night and smote the Edomites which compassed him about: and the captains of the chariots, and the people fled into their tents. 22. Yet Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time. 23. And the rest of the acts of Joram, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 24. And Joram slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead.

We have here a brief account of the life and reign of Jehoram, (or Joram) one of the worst of the kings of Judah, but the son and successor of Jehoshaphat, one of the best. Note, 1. Parents cannot give grace to their children; many that have themselves been godly, have had the grief and shame of seeing those that came forth out of their bowels wicked and vile; let not the families that are thus afflicted think it strange. 2. If the children of good parents prove wicked, commonly they are worse than others, the unclean spirit brings in seven others more wicked than himself, *Luke xi. 26.* 3. A nation is sometimes justly punished with the miseries of a bad reign, for not improving the blessings and advantages of a good one.

Concerning this Jehoram observe,

1. The general idea here given of his badness, *ver. 18.* *He did as the house of Ahab*, and worse he could not do; his character is taken from the bad example he followed, for men are according to the company they converse with, and the copies they write after; no mistake is more fatal to young people, than a mistake in the choice of those whom they would recommend themselves to, and take their measures from, and whose good opinion they value themselves by; Jehoram chose the house of Ahab for his pattern rather than his father's house, and it was his ruin; we have a particular account of his wickedness, *2 Chron. xxi.* murder, idolatry, persecution, every thing that was bad.

2. The occasions of his badness; his father was a very good man, and, no doubt, took care to have him taught the good knowledge of the Lord, but, (1.) It is certain, he did ill to marry him to the daughter of Ahab; no good could come by an alliance with an idolatrous family, but all mischief with such a daughter of such a mother as Athaliah the daughter of Jezebel; the degeneracy of the old world took rise from the unequal yoking of professors with profane; those that are ill-matched, are already half ruined. — (2.) I doubt he did not do well to make him

him king in his own life-time, it is said here, *ver. 16. he began to reign, Jehoshaphat being then king*, hereby he gratified his pride, (than which nothing is more pernicious to young people) indulged him in his ambition, in hopes to reform him by humouring him, and so brought a curse upon his family, as Eli did, *whose sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not*; Jehoshaphat had made this wicked son of his vice-roy once when he went with Ahab to Ramoth-gilead, from which Jehoshaphat's seventeenth year, 1 *Kings* xxii. 51. is made Jehoram's second, 2 *Kings* i. 17. but afterwards, in his twenty second year, he made him partner in his government, and from thence Joram's eight years are to be dated, three years before his father's death; it has been hurtful to many young men to come too soon to their estates; Samuel got nothing by *making his sons judges*.

3. The rebukes of providence which he was under for his badness. (1.) The Edomites revolted, who had been under the government of the kings of Judah ever since David's time, about one hundred and fifty years, *ver. 20.* He attempted to reduce them, and gave them a defeat, *ver. 21.* but he could not improve the advantage he had got, so as to recover his dominion over them; *yet Edom revolted, ver. 22.* and the Edomites were after this bitter enemies to the Jews, as appears by the prophecy of Obadiah, and *Psal. cxxxvii. 7.* Now Isaac's prophecy was fulfilled, that this Esau the elder should serve Jacob the younger, yet in process of time, he should *break that yoke from off his neck*, *Gen. xxvii. 40.* (2.) Libnah revolted, that was a city in Judah, in the heart of his country, a priests city, the inhabitants of that city shook off his government, *because he had forsaken God*, and would have compelled them to do so too, 2 *Chron. xxi. 10, 11.* and that they might preserve their religion set up for a free state, perhaps, other cities did the same. — (3.) His reign was short, God cut him off in the midst of his days, when he was but forty years old, and had reigned but eight years; *bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days.*

4. The gracious care of providence for the keeping up of the kingdom of Judah, and the house of David, notwithstanding the apostasies and calamities of Jehoram's reign, *ver. 19.* Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah, he could easily have done it, he might justly have done it, it would have been no loss to him to have done it, yet he would not do it for David's sake, not for the sake of any merit of his which could challenge this favour to his family as a debt, but for the sake of a promise made to him, that he should always have a lamp, *i. e.* a succession of kings from one generation to another; by which his name should be kept bright and illustrious, as a lamp is kept burning by a constant fresh supply of oil; that his family should never be extinct, till it terminated in the Messiah, that son of David, on whom was to be *hung all the glory of his Father's house*, and in whose everlasting kingdom that promise to David is fulfilled, *Psal. cxxxii. 17. I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed.*

5. The conclusion of this impious and inglorious reign, *ver. 23, 24.* Nothing peculiar is here said of him, but we are told, 2 *Chron. xxi. 19, 20.* that he died of *fore diseases*, and died *without being desired.*

25. ¶ In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, did Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah begin to reign. 26. Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem; and his mothers name was Athaliah, the daughter of Omri king of Israel. 27. And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the LORD, as did the house of Ahab: for he was the son in law of the house of Ahab. 28. ¶ And he went with Joram the son of Ahab, to the war against Hazael king of Syria in Ramoth-gilead, and the Syrians wounded Joram. 29. And king Joram went back to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him at Ramoth, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria, and Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah, went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick.

As among common persons there are some that we call little men, that make no figure, are little regarded, and less valued; so among kings, there are some that in comparison with others we may call little kings. This Ahaziah was one of these; he looks mean in the history, and, because wicked, in God's account, vile. — It is too plain an evidence of the affinity between Jehoshaphat and Ahab, that they had the same names in their families, at the same time, in which we may suppose, they designed to compliment one another. Ahab had two sons Ahaziah and Jehoram, that reigned successively; Jehoshaphat had a son and grandson named Jehoram and Ahaziah, that in like manner reigned successively. Names indeed do not make natures, but it was an ill omen to Jehoshaphat's family to borrow names from

Ahab's; or if he lent the names to that wretched family, he could not communicate with them the devotion of their significations, Ahaziah, *Taking hold of the Lord*; and Jehoram, *The Lord exalted.*

Ahaziah king of Israel had reigned but two years, Ahaziah king of Judah reigned but one: We are here told, that his relation to Ahab's family was the occasion,

1. Of his wickedness, *ver. 27. He walked in the way of the house of Ahab*, that idolatrous bloody house; for his mother was Ahab's daughter, *ver. 26.* So that he sucked in wickedness with his milk. *Partus sequitur ventrem.* When men choose wives for themselves, they must remember they are choosing mothers for their children, and are concerned to choose accordingly.

2. Of his fall. Joram, his mother's brother, courted him to join with him for the recovery of Ramoth-gilead, an attempt fatal to Ahab, so it was to Joram his son; for in that expedition he was wounded, *ver. 28.* and returned to Jezreel to be cured, leaving his army there in possession of the place. Ahaziah was likewise returned, but went to Jezreel to see how Jehoram did, *ver. 29.* Providence so ordered it, that he that had been debauched by the house of Ahab, might be cut off with them, when the measure of their iniquity was full, as we shall find in the next chapter. They that partake with sinners in their sin, must expect to partake with them in their plagues.

C H A P. IX.

Hazael and Jehu were the men that were designed to be the instruments of God's justice in punishing and destroying the house of Ahab: Elijah was bidden to appoint them to this service; but upon Ahab's humiliation, a reprieve was granted; and so it was left to Elisha to acquaint them. Hazael's elevation to the throne of Syria we read of in the foregoing chapter; and we must now attend Jehu to the throne of Israel; for he that escapeth the sword of Hazael, as Joram and Ahaziah did, Jehu must slay, of which this chapter gives us an account. (1.) A commission is sent to Jehu by the hand of one of the prophets, to take upon him the government, and destroy the house of Ahab, *ver. 1—10.* (2.) Here is his speedy execution of this commission. 1. He communicates it to his captains, *ver. 11—15.* 2. He marches directly to Jezreel, *ver. 16—20.* and there dispatcheth, (1.) Joram king of Israel, *ver. 20—26.* (2.) Ahaziah king of Judah, *ver. 27—29.* (3.) Jezebel, *ver. 30—37.*

1. **A**ND Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead. 2. And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber. 3. Then take the box of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith the LORD, I have anointed thee king over Israel: then open the door, and flee, and tarry not. 4. ¶ So the young man, even the young man the prophet, went to Ramoth-gilead. 5. And when he came, behold, the captains of the host were sitting; and he said, I have an errand to thee, O captain. And Jehu said, Unto which of all us? And he said, To thee, O captain. 6. And he arose, and went into the house, and he poured the oil on his head, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of the LORD, even over Israel. 7. And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel. 8. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish, and I will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel. 9. And I will make the house of Ahab, like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. 10. And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her. And he opened the door, and fled.

We have here the anointing of Jehu to be king who was at this time a commander (probably, commander in chief) of the forces employed at Ramoth-gilead, *ver. 14.* There he was fighting for the king his master, but received orders from a higher King to fight against him. It doth not appear that Jehu aimed at the government, or that he ever thought of it, but the commission given him was a perfect surprise to him. Some think he had been anointed before by Elijah, whom God ordered to do

do it, but privately, and with an intimation that he must not act till farther orders; as Samuel anointed David long before he was to come to the throne. But that is not at all probable, for then we must suppose Elijah had anointed Hazael too. No, when God bid him do these things, he bid him anoint Elisha to be prophet in his room, to do them when he was gone, as God should direct him. Here is,

1. The commission sent. Elisha did not go himself to anoint Jehu, because he was old, and unfit for such a journey, and so well known, that he could not do it privately, could not go and come without observation, therefore he sends one of the sons of the prophets to do it, ver. 1. They not only revered him as their father, chap. ii. 11. but observed and obeyed him as their father. This service of anointing Jehu, 1. Had danger in it, (1 Sam. xvi. 2.) and therefore it was not fit Elisha should expose himself, but one of the sons of the prophets, whose life was of less value, and who could do it with less danger. 2. It required labour, and therefore fitter for a young man in his full strength. Let youth work, and age direct. 3. Yet it was an honourable piece of service to anoint a king, and he that did it, might hope to be preferred for it afterwards, and therefore for the encouragement of the young prophets, Elisha employed one of them: he would not engross all the honours to himself, nor grudge the young prophets a share in them.

When he sent him, (1.) He put the oil into his hand with which he must anoint Jehu. *Take this box of oil.* Solomon was anointed with oil out of the tabernacle, 1 Kings i. 39. That could not now be had; but oil from a prophet's hand was equivalent to oil out of God's house. It was not the constant practice to anoint kings, but upon the disturbance of the succession, as in the case of Solomon; or the interruption of it, as in the case of Joash, chap. xi. 12. or the translation of the government to a new family, as here, and in the case of David; yet it might be used ordinarily, though the scripture do not mention it. (2.) He put the words into his mouth which he must say, ver. 3. *I have anointed thee king;* and, no doubt, told him all the rest that he said, ver. 7—10. Those whom God sends on his errand, shall not go without full instructions.

He also ordered him, 1. To do it privately; to single out Jehu from the rest of the captains, and anoint him in an inner chamber, ver. 2. that Jehu's confidence in his commission might be tried, when he had no witness to attest it; his being of a sudden spirited for the service, would be proof sufficient of his being anointed to it, there needed no other proof. The thing signified was the best evidence of the sign. 2. To do it expeditiously. When he went about it, he must gird up his loins; when he had done it, he must flee and not tarry for a fee, or a treat, or to see what Jehu would do. It becomes the sons of the prophets to be quick and lively at their work, to go about it, and go through it, as men that hate fantering and trifling. They should be as angels that fly swiftly.

2. The commission delivered. The young prophet did his business with dispatch; was at Ramoth-gilead presently, ver. 4. There he found the general-officers sitting together, either at dinner, or in a council of war, ver. 5. With the assurance that became a messenger from God, notwithstanding the meanness of his appearance, he called Jehu out from the rest, not waiting his leisure, or begging his pardon for disturbing him, but as one having authority, *I have an errand to thee, O captain.* Perhaps Jehu had some intimation of his business; and therefore that he might not seem too forward to catch at the honour, he asked, *To which of all us?* that it might not be said afterwards, he got it by speaking first, but they might all be satisfied he was indeed the person designed.

When the prophet had him alone, he anointed him, ver. 6. The anointing of the Spirit is a hidden thing; that new name, which none knows but they that have it. Herewith,

(1.) He invests him in the royal dignity, *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel,* whose messenger I am, in his name *I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord.* He gives him an uncontested title, but minds him that he was made king, 1. *By the God of Israel;* from him he must see his power derived, for by him kings reign, for him he must use it, and to him he must be accountable. Magistrates are the ministers of God, and must therefore act in dependence upon him, and with an entire devotedness to him, and to his glory. 2. *Over the Israel of God.* Though the people of Israel were wretchedly corrupted, and had forfeited all the honour of relation to God, yet they are here called the *people of the Lord*, for he had a right to them, and had not yet given them a bill of divorce. Jehu must look upon the people he was made king of, as the *people of the Lord*, not as his vassals, but God's freemen, his sons, his first-born, not to be abused or tyrannized over. *God's people,* and therefore to be ruled for him, and according to his laws.

(2.) He instructs him in his present service, which was to destroy all the house of Ahab, ver. 7. not that he might clear his own way to the throne, and secure to himself the possession of it, but that he might execute the judgments of God upon that guilty and obnoxious family. He calls Ahab his master, that the relation might be no objection. He was thy master,

and to lift up thy hand against his son and successor, would be not only base ingratitude, but treason, rebellion, and all that is naught, if thou hadst not an immediate command from God to do it: But thou art under higher obligations to thy master in heaven, than to thy master Ahab; he has determined, that *the whole house of Ahab shall perish,* and by thy hand; fear not, hath not he commanded thee? fear not sin; his command will justify thee, and bear thee out: fear not danger, his command will prosper thee, and bring thee off.

That he might intelligently, and in a right manner do this great execution on the house of Ahab, he tells him,

1. What was their crime, what the ground of the controversy, and wherefore God had this quarrel with them, that he might have an eye to that which God had an eye to, and that was *the blood of God's servants the prophets,* and other his faithful worshippers, which they had shed, and which must now be required at the hand of Jezebel. That they were idolaters was bad enough, and merited all that was brought upon them; yet that is not mentioned here, but the controversy God has with them, is for their being persecutors; not so much as their *throwing down God's altars,* as their *slaying his prophets with the sword.* Nothing fills the measure of the iniquity of any prince or people so as this doth, nor brings a surer and forer ruin. This was the sin that brought on Jerusalem its first destruction, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16. and its final one, Matt. xxiii. 37, 38. Jezebel's whoredoms and witchcrafts were not so provoking as her persecuting the prophets, killing some, and driving the rest into corners and caves, 1 Kings xviii. 4.

2. What was their doom, they were sentenced to utter destruction; not to be corrected, but to be cut off, and rooted out. This Jehu must know, that his eye might not spare for pity, favour, or affection. All that belonged to Ahab must be slain, ver. 8. A pattern is given him of the destruction intended, in the destruction of the families of Jeroboam and Baasha, ver. 9. and he is particularly directed to throw Jezebel to the dogs, ver. 10. The whole stock of royal blood was little enough, and too little, to atone for the blood of the prophets, the saints and martyrs, which in God's account is of great price.

The prophet, having done this errand, made the best of his way home again, and left Jehu alone to consider what he had to do, and to beg direction from God.

11. ¶ Then Jehu came forth to the servants of his lord, and one said unto him, *Is all well?* wherefore came this mad fellow to thee? And he said unto them, Ye know the man and his communication. 12. And they said, *It is false,* tell us now. And he said, Thus and thus spake he to me, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I have anointed thee king over Israel. 13. Then they hastened, and took every man his garment, and put it under him on the top of the stairs, and blew with trumpets, saying, Jehu is king. 14. So Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi conspired against Joram: (Now Joram had kept Ramoth-gilead, he and all Israel, because of Hazael king of Syria: 15. But king Joram was returned to be healed in Jezreel, of the wounds which the Syrians had given him, when he fought with Hazael king of Syria.) And Jehu said, If it be your minds, then let none go forth nor escape out of the city, to go to tell it in Jezreel.

Jehu, after some pause, returned to his place at the board, taking no notice of what had passed, but, as it should seem, designing for the present to keep it to himself, if they had not urged him to discover it: Let us therefore see what passed between him and the captains.

1. With what contempt the captains speak of the young prophet, ver. 11. *Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee?* What business has he with thee? And why wouldst thou humour him so far as to retire for conversation with him? Are prophets company for captains? They call him a mad fellow, because he was one of those that would not run with them to an excess of riot, 1 Pet. iv. 4. that lived a life of self-denial, mortification, and contempt of the world, and spent their time in devotion; for these things they thought the prophets were fools, and the *spiritual men were mad?* Hos. ix. 7. Note, Those that have no religion, commonly speak with disdain of those that are religious, and look upon them as crack'd-brained. They said of our Saviour, *he is beside himself;* of John Baptist, he *has a devil,* is a poor melancholy man; of St. Paul, that *much learning had made him mad:* The highest wisdom is thus represented as folly, and those that best understand themselves looked upon as beside themselves. — Perhaps, Jehu intended it for a rebuke to his friends, when he said, *Ye know the man* to be a prophet, why then do ye call him a mad fellow? Ye know the way of his communication to be not from madness, but inspiration. Or, being a prophet, you may guess what his business is, to tell me of my faults, and to teach me my duty; I need not inform you concerning

concerning it. Thus he thought to have put them off, but they urged him to tell them. It is false, (say they) we cannot conjecture what was his errand, and therefore tell us. Being thus pressed to it, he told them that the prophet had *anointed him king*, and, it is probable, shewed them the oil upon his head, *ver. 12*. He knew not but some of them, either out of loyalty to Joram, or envy of him, might oppose him, and go near to crush his interest in its infancy; but he relied on the divine appointment, and was not afraid to own it, knowing whom he had trusted: he that raised him would stand by him.

2. With what respect they compliment the new king upon the first notice of his advancement, *ver. 13*. How meanly soever they thought of the prophet that anointed him, and of his office, they expressed a great veneration for the royal dignity of him that was anointed, and were very forward to proclaim him with sound of trumpet: In token of their subjection and allegiance to him, their affection to his person and government, and their desire to see him high, and easy in it, they put their garments under him, that he might stand or sit upon them *on the top of the stairs*, in sight of the soldiers, who upon the first intimation came together to grace the solemnity. God put it into their hearts thus readily to own him, for he turns the hearts of people, as well as kings, like the rivers of water, into what channel he pleaseth. Perhaps they were disquieted at Joram's government, or had a particular affection for Jehu; however, it seems things were ripe for the revolution, and they all came into Jehu's interest, and *conspired against Joram*, *ver. 14*.

3. With what caution Jehu proceeded. He had advantages against Joram, and he knew how to improve them. He had the army with him: Joram had left it, and was gone home ill wounded. Now in two things Jehu's good conduct appears: 1. That he complimented the captains, and would do nothing without their advice and consent; if it be your minds, we will do so and so, else not; thereby intimating the deference he paid to their judgment, and the confidence he had in their fidelity, both which were very obliging. It is the wisdom of those that would rise fast, and stand firm, to take their friends along with them. 2. That he contrived to surprise Joram; and in order thereto, to come upon him with speed, and to prevent his having notice of what was now done: *Let none go forth to tell it in Jezreel*, that, as a snare, the ruin may come on him, and his house. The suddenness of an attack sometimes turns to as good an account as the force of it.

16. So Jehu rode in a chariot, and went to Jezreel, (for Joram lay there) and Ahaziah king of Judah was come down to see Joram. 17. And there stood a watchman on the tower in Jezreel, and he spied the company of Jehu as he came, and said, I see a company. And Joram said, Take an horseman, and send to meet them, and let him say, *Is it peace?* 18. So there went one on horseback to meet him, and said, Thus saith the king, *Is it peace?* And Jehu said, What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me. And the watchman told, saying, The messenger came to them, but he cometh not again. 19. Then he sent out a second on horseback, which came to them, and said, Thus saith the king, *Is it peace?* And Jehu answered, What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me. 20. And the watchman told, saying, He came even unto them, and cometh not again: and the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously. 21. And Joram said, Make ready. And his chariot was made ready. And Joram king of Israel, and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, and they went out against Jehu, and met him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite. 22. And it came to pass when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, *Is it peace, Jehu?* And he answered, What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel, and her witchcrafts are so many? 23. And Joram turned his hands, and fled, and said to Ahaziah, *There is treachery, O Ahaziah*. 24. And Jehu drew a bow with his full strength, and smote Jehoram between his arms, and the arrow went out at his heart, and he sunk down in his chariot. 25. Then said Jehu to Bidkar his captain, Take up, and cast him in the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite: for remember how that when I and thou rode together after Ahab his father, the LORD laid this burden upon him. 26. Surely, I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, said the LORD, and I will require thee in this plat, saith the LORD. Now therefore take and cast him into the plat of ground, according to the word of the LORD. 27. ¶ But when Ahaziah the king

of Judah saw this, he fled by the way of the garden-house: and Jehu followed after him, and said, Smite him also in the chariot: *And they did so*, at the going up to Gur, which is by Ibleam: and he fled to Megiddo, and died there. 28. And his servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his sepulchre with his fathers in the city of David. 29. And in the eleventh year of Joram the son of Ahab, began Ahaziah to reign over Judah.

From Ramoth-gilead to Jezreel was more than one day's march; about the mid-way between them the river Jordan must be crossed. We may suppose Jehu to have marched with all possible expedition, and to take the utmost precaution to prevent the tidings from getting to Jezreel before him; and at length we have him within ken first, and then within reach of the devoted king.

1. Joram's watchman discovers him first at a distance, him and his retinue, and gives notice to the king of the approach of a company, whether of friends or foes he cannot tell. But the king (impatient to know what is the matter, and, perhaps, jealous that the Syrians, who had wounded him, dogged him by the blood to his own palace, and were coming to seize him) sent first one messenger, and then another, to bring him intelligence, *ver. 17, 19*. He had scarce recovered the fright he was put into in the battle, and his guilty conscience put him into a continual terror. Each messenger asked the same question, *Is it peace?* Are you for us, or for our adversaries? Do you bring good tidings, or bad? And had the same answer, *What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me*, *ver. 18, 19. q. d.* It is not to thee, but to him that sent thee, that I will give answer; for thy part, if thou consult thy own safety, *turn thee behind me*, and list thy self among my followers. The watchman gives notice that the messengers were taken prisoners; and at length observes, that the leader of this troop drove like Jehu, who, it seems, was noted for driving furiously, thereby discovering himself to be a man of a hot eager spirit, intent upon his business, and pushing forward with all his might. A man of such a violent temper was fittest for the service to which Jehu was designed. The wisdom of God is seen in the choice of proper instruments to be employed in his work. But it is not much for any man's reputation to be known by his fury. He that has rule over his own spirit, is better than the mighty. The Chaldee paraphrase gives this a contrary sense: *The leading is like that of Jehu, for he leads quietly*. And it should seem, he did not come up very fast, for then there had not been time for all this that passed. And some think he chose to march slowly, that he might give Joram time to come out to him, and so dispatch him before he entered the city.

2. Joram himself goes out to meet him, and takes Ahaziah king of Judah along with him; neither of them equipt for war, as not expecting an enemy, but in haste to have their curiosity satisfied. How strangely has providence sometimes ordered it, that men have been in haste to meet their ruin, when their day has come to fall.

(1.) The place where Joram met Jehu was ominous, *in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite*, *ver. 21*. The very sight of that ground was enough to make Joram tremble, and Jehu triumph; for Joram had the guilt of Naboth's blood fighting against him, and Jehu had the force of Elijah's curse fighting for him. The circumstances of events are sometimes so ordered by divine providence, as to make the punishment answer the sin, as face answers to face in a glass.

2. Joram's demand was still the same, *Is it peace, Jehu?* Is all well? Dost thou come home thus flying from the Syrians, or more than a conqueror over them? It seems, he looked for peace, and could not entertain any other thought. Note, It is very common for great sinners, even when they are upon the brink of ruin, to flatter themselves with an opinion that all is well with them, and to cry peace to themselves.

3. Jehu's reply was very startling; he answered him with a question, *What peace canst thou expect, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel, (who though queen-dowager, was in effect queen-regent) and her witchcrafts are so many?* See how plainly Jehu deals with him: Formerly he durst not do so, but now he had another spirit. Note, Sinners will not always be flattered; one time or other they will have their own given them, *Psal. xxxvi. 2*. — Observe, 1. He chargeth upon him his mother's wickedness, because he had at first learned it, and then with his kingly power protected it. She stands impeached for whoredom, corporal and spiritual, serving idols, and serving them with the very acts of lewdness: For witchcraft likewise, enchantments and divinations, used in honour of her idols; and these multiplied, the whoredoms and the witchcrafts many; for those that abandon themselves to wicked courses, know not where they will stop. One sin begets another. 2. Upon that account he throws him off from all pretensions to peace; *What peace can come to that house in which there is so much wickedness unrepented of?* Note, The way of sin can never be the way

way of peace, *Isa. lvii. 21.* What peace can sinners have with God, what peace with their own consciences, what good, what comfort can they expect in life, in death, or after death, that go on still in their trespasses? No peace so long as sin is persisted in, but so soon as it is repented of, and forsaken, there is peace.

4. The execution was done immediately. When Joram heard of his mother's crimes, his heart failed him, he presently concluded the long threatened day of reckoning was now come, and cried out, *There is treachery, O Abaziah, Jehu is our enemy, and it is time for us to shift for our safety.* Both fled. And,

1. Joram king of Israel was slain presently, *ver. 24.* Jehu dispatched him with his own hands. The bow was not drawn at a venture, as that which sent the fatal arrow through the joints of his father's harness, but directed the arrow between his shoulders as he fled, (it was one of God's arrows which he *has ordained against the persecutor*, *Psal. vii. 13.*) and it reached to his heart, so that he died upon the spot. He was now the top branch of Ahab's house, and therefore was first cut off. He died a criminal, under the sentence of the law, which Jehu, the executioner, pursues in the disposal of the dead body. Naboth's vineyard was hard by, which put him in mind of that circumstance of the doom Elijah passed upon Ahab, *I will requite thee in this plat, said the Lord, (ver. 25, 26.) for the blood of Naboth himself, and for the blood of his sons,* who were either put to death with him as partners in his crime, or secretly murdered after, lest they should bring an appeal, or find some way to revenge their father's death; or had broke their hearts for the loss of him; or his whole estate being confiscated, as well as his vineyard, had lost their livelihoods, which was in effect to lose their lives: for this the house of Ahab must be reckoned with; and that very piece of ground which he with so much pride and pleasure had made himself master of, at the expence of the guilt of innocent blood, now became the theatre on which his son's dead body lay exposed a spectacle to the world. Thus *the Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth.* Haggai. *Selah.*

2. Abaziah king of Judah was pursued, and slain in a little time, and not far off, *ver. 27, 28.* (1.) Though he was now in Joram's company, he had not been slain but that he was joined with the house of Ahab both in affinity and in iniquity: he was one of them; so he had made himself by his sins, and therefore he must fare as they fare. Jehu justly construed his commission to extend to them. Yet, (2.) Perhaps he had not at this time fallen with them, if he had not been found in company with them. It is a dangerous thing to associate with evil-doers; we may be entangled both in guilt and misery by it.

30. And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it, and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window. 31. And as Jehu entred in at the gate, she said, *Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?* 32. And he lift up his face to the window, and said, *Who is on my side, who?* And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs. 33. And he said, *Throw her down.* So they threw her down; and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trod her under foot. 34. And when he was come in, he did eat and drink, and said, *Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a king's daughter.* 35. And they went to bury her, but they found no more of her than the scull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. 36. Wherefore they came again, and told him: and he said, *This is the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel:* 37. And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field, in the portion of Jezreel, so that they shall not say, *This is Jezebel.*

The greatest delinquent in the house of Ahab was Jezebel: it was she that introduced Baal; slew the Lord's prophets; contrived the murder of Naboth; stirred up her husband first, and then her sons, to do wickedly; a cursed woman she is here called, *ver. 34.* a curse to the country, and whom all that wished well to their country had a curse for; three reigns her reign had lasted, but now at length her day is come to fall. We read of a false prophetess in the church of Thyatira, that is compared to Jezebel, and called by her name, *Rev. ii. 20.* her wickedness the same, seducing God's servants to idolatry; a long space given her to repent, *ver. 21.* as to Jezebel; and a fearful ruin brought upon her at last, *ver. 22, 23.* as here upon Jezebel. So that Jezebel's destruction may be looked upon as typical of the destruction of idolaters and persecutors, especially that great whore, that mother of harlots, that hath made herself drunk with the blood of saints, and the nations drunk with the wine of her fornications, when God

shall put it into the heart of the kings of the earth to hate her, *Rev. xvii. 5, 6, 16.* Now here we have,

1. Jezebel daring the judgment. She heard that Jehu had slain her son, and slain him for her whoredoms and witchcrafts, and thrown his dead body into the portion of Naboth, according to the word of the Lord, and that he was now coming to Jezreel, where she could not but expect herself to fall next a sacrifice to his revenging sword; now see how she meets her fate. She posted herself in a window at the entring of the gate, to affront Jehu, and set him at defiance.

(1.) Instead of hiding herself, as one afraid of divine vengeance, she exposed herself to it, and scorned to flee; mocked at fear, and was not affrighted. See how a heart hardened against God will brave it out to the last, *runs upon him even upon his neck, Job xv. 25.* But never did any thus harden their hearts against him and prosper.

(2.) Instead of humbling herself and putting herself into close mourning for her son, she painted her face, and tired her head, that she might appear like herself, that is, (as she thought) great and majestick, hoping thereby to daunt Jehu, to dash him out of countenance, and to stop his career.—*The Lord God called to baldness and girding with sackcloth,* but behold painting and dressing, walking contrary to God, *Isa. xxii. 12, 13.* There is not a surer preface of ruin than an unhumiliated heart under humbling providences. Let painted faces look in Jezebel's glass, and see how they like themselves.

(3.) Instead of trembling before Jehu, the instrument of God's vengeance, she thinks to make him tremble with that threatening question, *Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?* Observe,

(1.) She took notice of the hand of God gone out against her family, but flew in the face of him that was only the sword in his hand. We are very apt, when we are in trouble, to break out into a passion against the instruments of our trouble, when we ought to be submissive to God, and angry at our selves only.

(2.) She pleased herself with the thought, that what Jehu was now doing, would certainly end in his own ruin, and that he would not have peace in it. He had cut her off from all pretensions to peace, *ver. 22.* and now she thinks to cut him off likewise. Note, It is no new thing for those that are doing God's work to be looked upon as out of the way of peace. Active reformers, faithful reprovers, are threatened with trouble, but let them be nothing terrified, *Phil. i. 28.* (3.) She quoted a precedent to deter him from the prosecution of this enterprize; *Had Zimri peace?* No, he had not; he came to the throne by blood and treachery, and within seven days was constrained to burn the palace over his head, and himself in it: And canst thou expect to fare any better? Had the case been parallel, it had been proper enough to give him this memorandum; for the judgments of God upon those that have gone before us in any sinful way, should be warnings to us to take heed of treading in their steps. But the instance of Zimri was misapplied to Jehu: Zimri had no warrant for what he did, but was incited to it purely by his own ambition and cruelty, whereas Jehu was anointed by one of the sons of the prophets, and did this by order from heaven, which would bear him out. In comparing persons and things, we must carefully distinguish between the precious and the vile, and take heed, lest from the fate of sinful men we read the doom of useful men.

2. Jehu demanding aid against her. He looked up to the window, not daunted at the menaces of her impudent but impotent rage, and cried, *Who is on my side? who?* *ver. 32.* He was called out to do God's work, in reforming the land, and punishing those that had debauched it; and here he calls out for assistance in the doing of it; looked if there were any to help, any to uphold, *Isa. lxiii. 5.* He lifts up a standard, and makes proclamation, as Moses, *Exod. xxxii. 26.* *Who is on the Lord's side?* And the psalmist, *Psal. xciv. 16.* *Who will rise up for me against the evil-doers?* Note, When reformation work is set on foot, it is time to ask, who sides with it.

3. Her own attendance delivering her up to his just revenge. Two or three chamberlains looked out to Jehu with such a countenance as encouraged him to believe they were on his side, and to them he called, not to seize or secure her till farther order, but immediately to throw her down, which was one way of stoning malefactors, casting them headlong from some steep place. Thus was vengeance taken on her for the stoning of Naboth: They threw her down, *ver. 33.* If God's command would justify Jehu, his command would justify them. Perhaps they had a secret dislike of Jezebel's wickedness, and hated her though they served her; or it may be she was barbarous and injurious to those about her, and they were pleased with this opportunity of being revenged on her; or observing Jehu's success, they hoped thus to ingratiate themselves with him, and keep their places in his court. However it was, thus she was most shamefully put to death, dashed against the wall, and the pavement, and then trodden on by the horses, which were all besmeared with her blood and brains. See the end of pride and cruelty, and say, *The Lord is righteous.*

4. The very dogs completing her shame and ruin, according to the prophecy. When Jehu had taken some refreshment in the palace

lace, he bethought himself of shewing so much respect to Jezebel's sex and quality, as to bury her. As bad as she was, she was a daughter, a king's daughter, a king's wife, a king's mother, *Go, and bury her*, ver. 34. But though he had forgot what the prophet said, ver. 10. *Dogs shall eat Jezebel*; God had not forgot it. While he was eating and drinking, the dogs had devoured her dead body, the dogs that *went about the city*, Psal. lxxix. 6. and fed upon the carrion, so that there was nothing left but her bare skull, (the painted face was gone) and her feet and hands. The hungry dogs had no respect to the dignity of her extraction: A king's daughter was no more to them than a common person. When we pamper our bodies, and use them deliciously, let us think how vile they are, and that shortly they will be either a feast for worms under-ground, or beasts above-ground. When notice was brought of this to Jehu, he remembered the threatening, *1 Kings xxi. 23. The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel*. Nothing should remain of her but the monuments of her infamy. She had been used to appear on publick days in great state, and it was, *This is Jezebel*: What a port doth she bear! What a figure doth she make! How great she looks! But now it shall be said no more. We have often seen the wicked buried, *Eccles. viii. 10.* yet sometimes, as here, they have no burial, *Eccles. vi. 3.* Jezebel's name no where remained, but stigmatized in sacred writ: they could not so much as say, this is Jezebel's dust; this is Jezebel's grave; or, this is Jezebel's feed. Thus the name of the wicked shall rot, rot above-ground.

C H A P. X.

We have in this chapter, 1. A farther account of Jehu's execution of his commission. He cut off, (1.) All Ahab's sons, ver. 1—10. (2.) All Ahab's kindred, ver. 11, 12, 13, 14, 17. (3.) Ahab's idolatry: his zeal against that he took Jonadab to be witness to, ver. 15, 16. summoned all the worshippers of Baal to attend, ver. 18—23. and slew them all, ver. 24, 25. and then abolished that idolatry, ver. 26—28. 2. A short account of the administration of his government. (1.) The old idolatry of Israel was retained, the worship of the calves, ver. 29—31. (2.) This brought God's judgments upon them by Hazael, with which his reign concludes, ver. 32—36.

1. **A**ND Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria: and Jehu wrote letters, and sent to Samaria, unto the rulers of Jezreel, to the elders, and to them that brought up Ahab's children, saying, 2. Now as soon as this letter cometh to you, seeing your masters sons are with you, and there are with you chariots and horses, a fenced city also, and armour: 3. Look even out the best and meekest of your masters sons, and set him on his fathers throne, and fight for your masters house. 4. But they were exceedingly afraid, and said, Behold, two kings stood not before him: how then shall we stand? 5. And he that was over the house, and he that was over the city, the elders also and the bringers up of the children sent to Jehu, saying, We are thy servants, and will do all that thou shalt bid us; we will not make any king: do thou that which is good in thine eyes. 6. Then he wrote a letter the second time to them, saying, if ye be mine, and if ye will hearken unto my voice, take ye the heads of the men your masters sons, and come to me to Jezreel by to morrow this time: (now the kings sons being seventy persons, were with the great men of the city, which brought them up) 7. And it came to pass when the letter came to them, that they took the kings sons, and slew seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent him them to Jezreel. 8. ¶ And there came a messenger, and told him, saying, They have brought the heads of the kings sons. And he said, Lay ye them in two heaps at the entering in of the gate, until the morning. 9. And it came to pass in the morning, that he went out, and stood, and said to all the people, Ye be righteous: behold, I conspired against my master, and slew him: but who slew all these? 10. Know now, that there shall fall unto the earth nothing of the word of the LORD, which the LORD spake concerning the house of Ahab: for the LORD hath done that which he spake by his servant Elijah. 11. So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining. 12. ¶ And he arose and departed, and came to Samaria. And as he was at the shearing-house in the way, 13. Jehu met with the brethren of Ahaziah king of Judah, and said, Who are ye?

And they answered, We are the brethren of Ahaziah, and we go down to salute the children of the king, and the children of the queen. 14. And he said, Take them alive. And they took them alive, and slew them at the pit of the shearing-house, even two and forty men; neither left he any of them.

We left Jehu in quiet possession of Jezreel, triumphing over Joram and Jezebel; and must now attend his farther motions. He knew the whole house of Ahab must be cut off, and therefore proceeds in this bloody work, and doth not do it deceitfully, or by the halves, *Jer. xlviii. 10.*

1. He got the heads of all the sons of Ahab, cut off by their own guardians at Samaria. Seventy sons (or grandsons) Ahab had; Gideon's number, *Judg. viii. 30.* In such a number that bare his name, his family was likely to be perpetuated, and yet it is extirpated all at once. Such a quiver full of arrows could not protect his house from divine vengeance. Numerous families, if vicious, must not expect to be prosperous long. — These sons of Ahab were now at Samaria, a strong city, perhaps brought thither upon occasion of the war with Syria, as a place of safety, or upon notice of Jehu's insurrection; with them were the rulers of Jezreel, i.e. the great officers of the court, who went to Samaria to secure themselves, or to consult what was to be done. Those of them that were yet under tuition, had their tutors with them, who were intrusted with their education in learning, agreeable to their birth and quality, but it is to be feared, brought them up in the idolatries of their father's house, and made them all worshippers of Baal. — Jehu did not think fit to bring his forces to Samaria to destroy them, but, that the hand of God might appear the more remarkably in it, made their guardians their murderers.

(1.) He sent a challenge to their friends to stand by them, ver. 2, 3. You that are hearty well-wishers to the house of Ahab, and entire in its interests, now is your time to appear for it: Samaria is a strong city, you are in possession of it; you have forces at command, you may choose out the likeliest person of all the royal family to head you, you know you are not tied to the eldest, unless he be the best and meekest of your master's sons: If you have any spirit in you, shew it, and set one of them on his father's throne, and stand by him with your lives and fortunes. Not that he desired they should do this, or expected they would, but thus he upbraided them with their cowardice, and utter inability to contest with the divine counsels. Do if you dare, and see what will come of it. Those that have forsaken their religion, have often with it lost both their sense and their courage, and deserve to be upbraided with it.

2. Hereby he gained from them a submission. They prudently reasoned with themselves, *Behold, two kings stood not before him*, but fell as sacrifices to his rage, *how then shall we stand?* ver. 4. therefore they sent him a surrender of themselves, *We are thy servants*, thy subjects, and will do all that thou shalt bid us, right or wrong, and will set up no body in competition with thee. They saw it was to no purpose to contend with him, and therefore it was their interest to truckle to him. With much more reason may we thus argue ourselves into a subjection to the great God. Many kings and great men have fallen before his wrath, for their wickedness, and how then shall we stand? *Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?* No, we must either bend or break.

3. This is improved so far as to make them the executioners of those whom they had the tuition of, ver. 6. *If ye be mine, bring me the heads of your master's sons by to-morrow at this time.* Though he knew it must be done, and was loth to do it himself, one would think he could not expect they should do it. Could they betray such a trust? Could they be cruel to their master's sons? It seems, so low did they stoop in their adorations of the rising sun, that they did it; they cut off the heads of those seventy princes, and sent them in baskets a present to Jehu, ver. 7. Learn hence not to trust in a friend, nor to put confidence in a guide not governed by conscience. One can scarce expect that he who has been false to his God, should ever be faithful to his prince. But observe God's righteousness in their unrighteousness: These elders of Jezreel had been wickedly obsequious to Jezebel's order for the murder of Naboth, *1 Kings xxi. 11.* She gloried, it is likely, in the power she had over them; and now the same base spirit makes them as pliable to Jehu, and as ready to obey his orders for the murder of Ahab's sons. Let none aim at an arbitrary power, lest they be found rolling a stone which some time or other will return upon them. Princes that make their people slaves, take the readiest way to make them rebels; and by forcing mens consciences, as Jezebel did, they lose their hold of them.

When the separated heads were presented to him, he slyly upbraided them that were executioners, yet owned the hand of God in it. (1.) He seems to blame those that had been the executioners of this vengeance. The heads were laid in two heaps, at the gate, the proper place of judgment. There he acquitted the people before God and the world, ver. 9. *Ye be righteous*; and by what the rulers of Samaria had now done, comparatively acquitted

acquitted himself: I slew but one, they have slain all these: I did it by conspiracy, and with design, they have done this purely in compliance, and with an implicit obedience. Let not the people of Samaria, nor any of the friends of the house of Ahab, ever reproach me for what I have done, when their own elders, and the very guardians of the orphans, have done this. It is common for those who have done something ill, to endeavour the mitigation of their own reproach, by drawing others in to do something worse. But, (1.) He resolves all into the righteous judgment of God, *ver. 10. The Lord hath done that which he spake by Elijah.* God is not the author of any man's sin, but even by that which men do from ill principles, God serves his own purposes, and glorifies his own name; and is righteous in that wherein men are unrighteous. When the Assyrian is made the *rod of God's anger*, and the instrument of his justice, *he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so, Isa. x. 7.*

5. He proceeded to destroy all that remained of the house of Ahab, not only those that descended from him, but those that were in relation to him, all the officers of his household, ministers of state, and those in command under him, called here his great men, *ver. 11.* all his kinsfolks and acquaintance, who had been partners with him in his wickedness, and his priests, or domestick chaplains, whom he employed in his idolatrous services, and who strengthened his hand, that he should not turn from his evil way. Having done this in Jezreel, he did the same in Samaria, *ver. 17. slew all that remained to Ahab in Samaria.* This was bloody work, and is not now in any case to be drawn into a precedent. Let the guilty suffer, but not the guiltless for their sakes. Perhaps such terrible destructions as these, were intended as types of the final destruction of all the ungodly. God has a sword, bathed in heaven, which will come down upon the people of his curse, and be filled with blood, *Isa. xxxv. 5, 6.* Then his eye will not spare, neither will he pity.

6. Providence bringing the brethren of Ahaziah in his way, as he was going on with this execution, he slew them likewise, *ver. 12, 13, 14.* The brethren of Ahaziah were slain by the Arabians, *2 Chr. xxii. 1.* but these were the sons of his brethren, as it is there explained, *ver. 8.* and they are said to be princes of Judah, and to minister to Ahaziah. Several things concurred to make them obnoxious to the vengeance Jehu was now executing. (1.) They were branches of Ahab's house, being descended from Athaliah, and therefore fell within his commission. (2.) They were tainted with the wickedness of the house of Ahab. (3.) They were now going to make their court to the princes of the house of Ahab, to salute the children of the king and the queen, Joram and Jezebel, which shewed they were linked to them in affection as well as in affinity. These princes, forty two in number, being appointed as sheep for the sacrifice, were slain with solemnity, at the pit of the shearing house. The Lord is known by these judgments which he executeth.

15. ¶ And when he was departed thence, he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab, coming to meet him, and he saluted him, and said to him, Is thine heart right; as my heart is with thine heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give me thine hand: and he gave him his hand, and he took him up to him into the chariot. 16. And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD: So they made him ride in his chariot. 17. And when he came to Samaria, he slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed him, according to the saying of the LORD, which he spake to Elijah. 18. ¶ And Jehu gathered all the people together, and said unto them, Ahab served Baal a little, but Jehu shall serve him much. 19. Now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests, let none be wanting: for I have a great sacrifice to do to Baal; whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live. But Jehu did it by subtilty, to the intent that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal. 20. And Jehu said, Proclaim a solemn assembly for Baal. And they proclaimed it. 21. And Jehu sent through all Israel, and all the worshippers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left that came not: and they came into the house of Baal, and the house of Baal was full from one end to another. 22. And he said unto him that was over the vestry, Bring forth vestments for all the worshippers of Baal. And he brought them forth vestments. 23. And Jehu went and Jehonadab the son of Rechab, into the house of Baal, and said unto the worshippers of Baal, Search, and look that there be here with you none of the servants of the LORD, but the worshippers of Baal only. 24. And when they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings, Jehu appointed fourscore men without, and said, If any of the men whom I have brought into your hands, escape,

Nº. 27.

be that letteth him go, his life shall be for the life of him. 25. And it came to pass as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt-offering, that Jehu said to the guard, and to the captains, Go in, and slay them, let none come forth. And they smote them with the edge of the sword, and the guard and the captains cast them out, and went to the city of the house of Baal. 26. And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burnt them. 27. And they brake down the image of Baal, and brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house until this day. 28. Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel.

Jehu pushing on his work, is here,

1. Courting the friendship of a good man, *Jehonadab the son of Rechab, ver. 15, 16.* This Jonadab, though mortified to the world, and meddling little with the business of it, (as appears by his charge to his posterity, which they religiously observed three hundred years after, not to drink wine, nor dwell in cities, *Jer. xxxv. 6, &c.*) yet upon this occasion he went to meet Jehu, that he might encourage him in the work to which God had called him. The countenance of good men is a thing which great men, if they be wise, will value, and value themselves by. David prayed, *Let those that fear thee turn to me, Psal. cxix. 79.* This Jonadab, though no prophet, priest or Levite, no prince or ruler, yet we may suppose was very eminent for prudence and piety, and generally respected for that life of self-denial and devotion which he lived: Jehu, though a soldier, knew him, and honoured him. He did not indeed think of sending for him, but when he met him, (though, it is likely, he drove now as furiously as ever, yet) he stopt to speak to him; and we are here told what passed between them.

1. Jehu saluted him; he blessed him, so the word is: paid him the respect, and shewed him the good-will that was owing to so great an example of serious godliness.

2. Jehonadab assured him that he was sincere in his interest, and a hearty well wisher to his cause. Jehu professed that *his heart was right with him*, that he had a true affection for his person, and a veneration for the crown of his nazariteship, and desired to know whether he had the same affection for him, and satisfaction in that crown of royal dignity which God had put upon his head, *Is thine heart right?* A question we should oft put to our selves: I make a plausible profession, have gained a reputation among men, but *Is my heart right?* Am I sincere and inward with God? Jehonadab gave him his word, It is, and gave him his hand as a pledge of his heart, yielded to him, (so giving the hand is rendered, *2 Chr. xxx. 8.*) concurred and covenanted with him, and owned him in the work both of revenge and of reformation he was now about.

3. Jehu took him up into his chariot, and took him along with him to Samaria. He put some honour upon him, by taking him into the chariot with him; Jehonadab did not use to be coached, much less with a king: But he received more honour from him, and from the countenance he gave to his present work. All sober people would think the better of Jehu, when they saw Jehonadab in the chariot with him. This was not the only time that the piety of some has been made to serve the policy of others; and that designing men have strengthened themselves by drawing good men into their interests. Jehonadab was a stranger to the arts of fleshly wisdom, and has his conversation in simplicity and godly sincerity; and therefore if Jehu be a servant of God, and an enemy to Baal, he will be his faithful friend. Come then (saith Jehu) come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord; and then thou wilt see reason to espouse my cause. This is commonly taken as not well said by Jehu, and as giving cause to suspect that his heart was not right with God in what he did, and that the zeal he pretended for the Lord, was really zeal for himself, and his own advancement. For, (1.) He boasted of it, and spoke as if God and man were mightily indebted to him for it. (2.) He desired it might be seen, and taken notice of, like the Pharisees, who did all to be seen of men. An upright heart approves it self to God, and covets no more than his acceptance. If we aim at the applause of men, and make their praise our highest end, we are upon a false bottom.—Whether Jehu looked any farther, we cannot judge; however Jehonadab went with him, and, it is likely, animated and assisted him in the farther execution of his commission, *ver. 17.* destroying all Ahab's friends in Samaria. A man may hate cruelty, and yet love justice; may be far from thirsting after blood, and yet may wash his feet in the blood of the wicked, *Psal. lviii. 10.*

2. Contriving the destruction of all the worshippers of Baal. The service of Baal was the crying sin of the house of Ahab: that root of this idolatry was plucked up, but multitudes yet remained that were infected with it, and would be in danger to infect others. The law of God was express, that they were to be put to death; but they were so numerous, and so dispersed throughout all parts of the kingdom, and perhaps so alarmed with Jehu's beginnings, that it would be a hard matter to find them all out,

and an endless task to prosecute and execute them one by one; Jehu's project therefore is to cut them all off together.

1. By a wile, by a fraud he brings them together to the temple of Baal. He pretended he would worship Baal more than ever Ahab had done, *ver. 18.* Perhaps he spoke this ironically, or to try the body of the people, whether they would oppose such a resolution as this, and would resent his threatening to increase his predecessors idolaters, as they did Rehoboam's threatening to increase his predecessors exactions, and say, if it be so, we have not part in Jehu, nor inheritance in the son of Nimshi. But it rather seems to have been spoken purposely to deceive the worshippers of Baal, and then it cannot be justified. The truth of God needs not any man's lie. He issued out a proclamation, requiring the attendance of all the worshippers of Baal, to join with him in a sacrifice to Baal, *ver. 19, 20.* not only the prophets and priests, but all throughout the kingdom that worshipped Baal, who were nothing so many as they had been in Elijah's time. Jehu's friends, we may suppose, were aware what he designed, and were not offended at it; but the bigotted besotted Baalites began to think themselves very happy, and that now they should see golden days again. *Foram had put away the image of Baal, chap. iii. 2.* if Jehu will restore it, they have what they would have, and come up to Samaria with joy from all parts to celebrate the solemnity; and were pleased to see the house of Baal crowded, *ver. 21.* to see his priests in their vestments, *ver. 22.* and themselves perhaps with some badges or other to notify their relation to Baal, for there were vestments for all his worshippers.

2. He takes care that none of the servants of the Lord should be among them, *ver. 23.* This they took as a provision to preserve the worship of Baal from being profaned by strangers: but it was a wonder they did not by this see themselves brought into a snare, and discern a design upon them. They that suffer themselves to be deceived by Baal, (as all idolaters were by their idols) no marvel if they were deceived by Jehu to their destruction.

3. He gives order for the cutting of them all off, and Jehonadab joined with him therein, *ver. 23.* When a strict search was made, that none of the servants of God were either for company or curiosity got among them, that there was no wheat among those tares: and eighty men were set to stand guard at all the avenues to Baal's temple, that none might escape, *ver. 24.* then the guards were sent in to put them all to the sword, and to *mingie their blood with their sacrifices*, in a way of just revenge, as they themselves had sometimes done, when in their blind devotion they cut themselves with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out, *1 Kings xviii. 28.* This was accordingly done, and the doing of it, though seemingly barbarous, yet considering the nature of their crime, it was really righteous; *The Lord, whose name is jealous, is a jealous God.*

4. The idolaters being thus destroyed, the idolatry itself is utterly abolished. The buildings about the house of Baal (which were so many, and so stately, that they are here called a city) where Baal's priests and their families lived, were destroyed: all the little images, statues, pictures or shrines, which beautified Baal's temple, with the great image of Baal himself, were brought out and burnt, *ver. 26, 27.* and the temple of Baal broken down, and made a dunghill, the common sink or shore of the city, that the remembrance of it might be blotted out, or made infamous. Thus was the worship of Baal quite destroyed, at least for the present, out of Israel, though it had once prevailed so far, that there were but seven thousand of all the thousands of Israel, that had not bowed the knee to Baal, and those *iniquita.* — Thus will God smite all the gods of the heathen, and sooner or later triumph over them all.

20. ¶ Howbeit, from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, *to wit,* the golden calves that were in Beth-el, and that were in Dan. 30. And the LORD said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing *that which is right in mine eyes,* and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel. 31. But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin. 32. ¶ In those days the LORD began to cut Israel short: and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel; 33. From Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer (which is by the river Arnon) even Gilead and Bashan. 34. Now the rest of the acts of Jehu, and all that he did, and all his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 35. And Jehu slept with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria, and Jehoahaz his son reigned in his stead. 36. And the time that Jehu

reigned over Israel in Samaria, was twenty and eight years.

Here is all the account of the reign of Jehu, though it continued twenty eight years. The progress of it answered not the glory of its beginning. We have here,

1. God's approbation of what Jehu had done. Many, it is probable, censured him as treacherous and barbarous, called him a rebel, a usurper, a murderer, and prognosticated ill concerning him, that a family thus raised would soon be ruined; but God said, well done, (*ver. 30.*) and then the matter was not great who said otherwise. (1.) God pronounced that to be right which he had done. It is justly questionable, whether he did it from a good principle, and whether he did not take some false steps in the doing of it; and yet (saith God) *Thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes.* The extirpating of idolaters and idolatry was a thing right in God's eyes, for it is an iniquity he visits as surely and severely as any other: It was according to all that was in his heart, all he desired, all he designed; Jehu went through with his work. (2.) God promised him a reward, That his children of the fourth generation from him should sit upon the throne of Israel. This was more than in any of the dignities or royal families of that kingdom; of the house of Ahab there were indeed four kings, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah and Joram, but the two last were brothers, so that it reached but to the third generation, and that whole family continued but about forty five years in all, whereas Jehu's continued in four, besides himself, and in all about a hundred twenty years. Note, No services done for God shall go unrewarded.

2. Jehu's carelessness in what he was farther to do. By this it appeared his heart was not right with God, that he was partial in his reformation. (1.) He did not put away all the evil. He departed from the sins of Ahab, but not from the sins of Jeroboam, discarded Baal, but adhered to the calves. The worship of Baal was indeed the greater evil, and more heinous in the sight of God, but the worship of the calves was a great evil, and true conversion is not only from gross sin, but from all sin; not only from false gods, but from false worships. The worship of Baal weakened and diminished Israel, and made them beholden to the Sidonians, and therefore he could easily part with that: but the worship of the calves was a politick idolatry, was begun and kept up for reasons of state, to prevent the return of the ten tribes to the house of David, and therefore Jehu clave to that. True conversion is not only from wastful sins; but from gainful sins; not only from those sins that are destructive to the secular interest, but from those that support and befriend it; in forsaking which is the great trial, whether we can deny our selves, and trust God. (2.) He put away evil, but he did not mind that which was good, *ver. 31:* *He took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel.* He abolished the worship of Baal, but did not keep up the worship of God, nor walk in his law. He had shewed great care and zeal for the rooting out of a false religion, but in the true religion, 1. He shewed no care, took no heed, lived at large, was not at all solicitous to please God, and do his duty; took no heed to the scriptures, to the prophets, to his own conscience, but walked at all adventures. Those that are heedless, it is to be feared, they are graceless; for where there is a good principle in the heart, it will make men cautious and circumspect, desirous to please God, and jealous of doing any thing to offend him. 2. He shewed no zeal; what he did in religion, he did not do it with his heart, with all his heart, but did it as if he did it not, without any liveliness or concern. It seems, he was a man that had little religion himself, and yet God made use of him as an instrument of reformation in Israel. It is a pity but those that do good to others, should always be good themselves.

3. The judgment that came upon Israel in his reign. We have reason to fear, that when Jehu took no heed himself to walk in God's law, the people were generally as careless as he, both in their devotions, and in their conversations. There was a general decay of piety, and increase of profaneness, and therefore, it is not strange that the next news we hear is, *In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short,* *ver. 32.* Their neighbours encroached upon them on every side; they were short in their duty to God, and therefore God cut them short in their extent, wealth, and power. Hazael, king of Syria was, above any other, vexatious and mischievous to them, *smote them in all the coasts of Israel,* particularly the countries on the other side Jordan, which lay next him, and most exposed; on these he made continual inroads, and laid them waste. Now the Reubenites and Gadites smarted for the choice which their ancestors made of an inheritance on that side Jordan, which Moses reproved them for, *Numb. xxxii.* Now Hazael did, what Elisha foresaw he would do, and foretold: But for doing it God had a quarrel with him, and with his kingdom, as we may find, *Amos i. 3, 4.* Because they of Damascus have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron, therefore (saith God) *I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad.*

Lastly,

Lastly, The conclusion of Jehu's reign, *ver.* 34—36. Notice is taken in general of his might, but because he took no heed to serve God, the memorials of his mighty enterprises and achievements are justly buried in oblivion.

C H A P. XI.

The revolution in the kingdom of Israel was soon perfected in Jehu's settlement; we must now inquire into the affairs of the kingdom of Judah, which lost its head (such as it was) at the same time, and by the same hand as Israel did; but things continued longer there in distraction than in Israel, yet after some years, were brought into good a posture, as we find in this chapter. 1. Athaliah usurps the government, and destroys all the seed royal, ver. 1. 2. Joash, a child of a year old, is wonderfully preserved, ver. 2, 3. 3. At six years end he is produced, and by the agency of Jehoiada made king, ver. 4—12. 4. Athaliah is slain, ver. 13—16. 5. Both the civil and religious interests of the kingdom are well settled in the hands of Joash, ver. 17—21. And thus, after some interruption, things returned with advantage into the old channel.

1. **A**ND when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose, and destroyed all the seed royal. 2. But Jehosheba the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the kings sons which were slain; and they hid him, even him and his nurse in the bed-chamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain. 3. And he was with her hid in the house of the LORD, six years: and Athaliah did reign over the land.

God had assured David of the continuance of his family, which is called his *ordaining a lamp for his anointed*: And this cannot but appear a great thing, now we have read of the utter extirpation of so many royal families, one after another. Now here we have David's promised lamp almost extinguished, and yet wonderfully preserved.

1. It was almost extinguished by the barbarous malice of Athaliah, the queen-mother, who, when she heard that her son Ahaziah was slain by Jehu, *arose and destroyed all the seed royal*, *ver.* 1. all that she knew to be akin to the crown. Her husband Jehoram had slain all his brethren the sons of Jehoshaphat, *2 Chron.* xxi. 4. The Arabians had slain all Jehoram's sons but Ahaziah, *2 Chron.* xxi. 1. Jehu had slain all their sons, *2 Chron.* xxii. 8. and Ahaziah himself. Sure never was royal blood so profusely shed: happy the mean that live below envy and emulation! But, as if all this were but a small matter, Athaliah destroys all that were left of the seed royal: it was strange, that one of the tender sex could be so barbarous, that one who had been herself a king's daughter, a king's wife, and a king's mother, could be so barbarous to a royal family, and a family into which she was herself engrafted; but she did it, (1.) From a spirit of ambition, she thirsted after rule, and thought she could not get to it any other way; that none might reign with her, she slew even the infants and sucklings that might have reigned after her; for fear of a competitor, not any must be reserved for a successor; and, (2.) From a spirit of revenge and rage against God; the house of Ahab being utterly destroyed, and her son Ahaziah among the rest, because he was akin to it; she resolved, as it were by way of reprisal, to destroy the house of David, and cut off his line, in defiance of God's promise to perpetuate it; a foolish attempt and fruitless, for who can disannul what God hath purposed?—Grandmothers have been thought more fond of their grandchildren than they were of their own, yet Ahaziah's own mother is the wilful murderer of Ahaziah's own sons, and in their infancy too, when she was obliged above any other to nurse them, and take care of them; well might she be called Athaliah, *that wicked woman*, *2 Chron.* xxiv. 7. Jezebel's own daughter, yet herein God was righteous, and visited the iniquity of Joram and Ahaziah, those degenerate branches of David's house, upon their children.

2. It was wonderfully preserved by the pious care of one of Joram's daughters, that was wife to Jehoiada the priest, who stole away one of the king's sons, Joash by name, and hid him, *ver.* 2, 3. This was a brand plucked out of the fire; what number were slain we are not told, but it seems, this being a child in the nurse's arms was not missed, or not enquired after, or however not found; the person that delivered him was his own aunt, the daughter of wicked Joram; for those whom God will have protected, he will raise up protectors; the place of his safety was the house of the Lord, one of the chambers belonging to the temple, a place Athaliah seldom troubled; his aunt, by bringing him hither, put him under God's special protection, and so hid him by faith, as Moses was hid; now were David's words made good to one of his seed, *Psal.* xxvii. 5. *In the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me.* With good reason did this Joash, when he grew up, set himself to repair the house of

the Lord, for it had been a sanctuary to him; now was the promise made to David bound up in one life, and yet it did not fail; thus to the son of David will God, according to his promise, secure a spiritual seed, which, though sometimes reduced to a small number, brought very low, and seemingly lost, will be perpetuated to the end of time, hid sometimes and unseen, but hid in God's pavilion and unhurt. — It was a special providence that Joram, though a king, a wicked king, married his daughter to Jehoiada a priest, a godly priest; some perhaps thought it a disparagement to the royal family to marry a daughter to a clergyman, but it proved a happy marriage, and the saving of the royal family from ruin, for Jehoiada's interest in the temple gave her an opportunity to preserve the child, and her interest in the royal family gave him an opportunity to set him on the throne; see the reaches of providence, and how it prepares for what it designs, and see what blessings they lay up in store for their families, that marry their children to those that are wise and good.

4. ¶ And the seventh year Jehoiada sent and fet the rulers over hundreds, with the captains, and the guard; and brought them to him into the house of the LORD, and made a covenant with them, and took an oath of them in the house of the LORD, and shewed them the king's son. 5. And he commanded them saying, This is the thing that ye shall do; A third part of you that enter in on the sabbath, shall even be keepers of the watch of the king's house: 6. And a third part shall be at the gate of Sur: and a third part at the gate behind the guard: so shall ye keep the watch of the house, that it be not broken down. 7. And two parts of all you, that go forth on the sabbath, even they shall keep the watch of the house of the LORD about the king. 8. And ye shall compass the king round about, every man with his weapons in his hand: and he that cometh within the ranges, let him be slain; and be ye with the king, as he goeth out, and as he cometh in. 9. And the captains over the hundreds did according to all things that Jehoiada the priest commanded: and they took every man his men that were to come in on the sabbath, with them that should go out on the sabbath, and came to Jehoiada the priest. 10. And to the captains over the hundreds did the priests give king David's spears and shields that were in the temple of the LORD. 11. And the guard stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, round about the king, from the right corner of the temple, to the left corner of the temple, along by the altar and the temple. 12. And he brought forth the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and gave him the testimony, and they made him king, and anointed him, and they clapt their hands, and said, God save the king.

Six years Athaliah tyrannized; we have not a particular account of her reign, no doubt, it was of a piece with the beginning; while Jehu was extirpating the worship of Baal in Israel, she was establishing it in Judah, as appears, *2 Chron.* xxiv. 7. The court and kingdom of Judah had been debauched by their alliance with the house of Ahab, and now one of that house is a curse and plague to both, sinful friendships speed no better; all this while Joash lay hid, entitled to a crown, and intended for it, and yet buried alive in obscurity; though the sons and heirs of heaven are now hid, *the world knows them not*, *1 John* iii. 1. but the time is fixed when they shall appear in glory, as Joash in his seventh year, by that time he was ready to be shewed, not a babe, but having served his first apprenticeship to life, and being arrived to his first climacterical year, had taken a good step towards manhood; by that time the people were grown weary of Athaliah's tyranny, and ripe for a revolution; how that revolution was effected we are told.

1. The manager of this great affair was Jehoiada the priest, probably the high priest, or at least the Sagan, (as the Jews called him) or suffragan to the high priest; by his birth and office he was a man in authority, whom the people were bound by the law to observe and obey, especially when there was no rightful king upon the throne, *Deut.* xvii. 12. By marriage he was allied to the royal family, and if all the seed royal were destroyed, his wife, as daughter to Joram, had a better title to the crown than Athaliah had; by his eminent gifts and graces he was fitted to serve his country, and better service he could not do it, than to free it from Athaliah's usurpation; and we have reason to think he did not make this attempt, till he had first asked counsel of God, and known his mind, either by prophets, or Urim, or both.

2. The management was very discreet, and as became so wise and good a man as Jehoiada was.

(1.) He concerted the matter with the *rulers of hundreds and the captains*, the men in office, ecclesiastical, civil and military, got them to him to the temple, consulted with them, laid before them the grievances they at present laboured under, gave them an oath of secrecy, and finding them free and forward to join with him, he *showed them the king's son*, ver. 4. and so well satisfied were they with his fidelity, that they saw no reason to suspect a sham; we may well think what a pleasing surprize it was to the good people among them, who feared the house and lineage of David was quite cut off, to find such a spark as this in the embers.

(2.) He posted the priests and Levites, who were more immediately under his direction, in the several avenues to the temple, to keep the guards, putting them under the command of the *rulers of hundreds*, ver. 9. David had divided the priests into courses, which waited by turns, every sabbath-day morning a new company came into waiting, but the company of the foregoing week did not go out of waiting till the sabbath evening, so that on the sabbath-day, when double service was to be done, there was a double number to do it, both they that were to come in, and they that were to go out, these Jehoiada employed to attend on this great occasion, he armed them out of magazines of the temple with David's spears and shields, either his own or those he had taken from his enemies, which he devoted to God's honour, ver. 10. If they were old and unfashionable, yet they that used them might by their being David's be minded of God's covenant with him, which they were now acting in the defence of.

Two things they were ordered to do, 1. To protect the young king from being insulted, they must *keep the watch of the king's house*, ver. 5. *compass the king*, and *be with him*, ver. 8. to guard him from Athaliah's partizans, for still, there were those that thirsted after royal blood. 2. To preserve the holy temple from being profaned by the concourse of people that would come together on this occasion, ver. 6. *Keep the watch of the house that it be not* either broken through or broken down, and so strangers should croud in, or such as were unclean; he was not so zealous for the projected revolution as to forget his religion; in times of the greatest hurry, care must be taken that the holy things of God be not intrenched upon, *Ne detrimentum capiat ecclesia*. — It is observable, that Jehoiada appointed to each his place as well as his work, ver. 6, 7. for good order contributes very much to the expediting and accomplishing any great enterprise; let every man know, and keep, and make good his post, and then the work will be done suddenly.

3. When the guards were fixed, then the king was brought forth, ver. 12. *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion*, for even in thy holy mountain thy king appears, a child indeed, but not such a one as brings a wo upon the land, for he was the son of nobles, the son of David, *Ecclef. x. 17*. A child indeed, but he had a good guardian, and, which was better, a good God to go to; Jehoiada, without delay, proceeded to the coronation of this young king, for though he was not yet capable of dispatching business, he would be growing up towards it by degrees; this was done with great solemnity, ver. 12. 1. In token of his being invested with kingly power, he *put the crown upon him*, though it was yet too big and too heavy for his head; the regalia, it is probable, were kept in the temple, and so the crown was ready at hand. — 2. In token of his obligation to govern by law, and to make the word of God his rule, he gave him the testimony, put a Bible into his hand, which he must *read in all the days of his life*, Deut. xvii. 18, 19. 3. In token of his receiving the spirit, to qualify him for this great work to which he was called, he anointed him; though notice is taken of the anointing of their kings only in case of interruption, as here, and in Solomon's case, yet I know not but the ceremony might be used to all their kings, at least those of the house of David, because their royalty was typical of Christ's, who was to be anointed above his fellows, above all the sons of David. — 4. In token of the peoples acceptance of him, and subjection to his government, they clapt their hands for joy, and expressed their hearty good wishes to him, *Let the king live*, and thus they made him king, made him their king, consented to and concurred with the divine appointment; they had reason to rejoice in the period now put to Athaliah's tyranny, and the prospect they had of the restoration and establishment of religion, by a king under the tuition of so good a man as Jehoiada; they had reason to bid him welcome to the crown whose right it was, and to pray *Let him live*, who came to them as life from the dead, and in whom the house of David was to live; with such acclamations of joy and satisfaction must the kingdom of Christ be welcomed into our hearts when his throne is set up there, and Satan the usurper is deposed; *Hymanna, blessed is he that comes*; clap hands and say, *Let king Jesus live*, for ever live and reign in my soul, and in all the world; it is promised, *Psal. lxxii. 15. He shall live, and prayer shall be made for him, and his kingdom, continually*.

13. ¶ And when Athaliah heard the noise of the guard, and of the people, she came to the people into the temple of the LORD. 14. And when she look-

ed, behold, the king stood by a pillar, as the manner was, and the princes, and the trumpeters by the king, and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew with trumpets: and Athaliah rent her clothes, and cried, *Treason, treason*. 15. But Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of the hundreds, the officers of the host, and said unto them, *Have her forth without the ranges*; and him that followeth her, *kill with the sword*. For the priest had said, *Let her not be slain in the house of the LORD*. 16. And they laid hands on her, and she went by the way by the which the horses came into the kings house, and there was she slain.

We may suppose it was designed, when they had finished the solemnity of the king's inauguration, to make a visit to Athaliah; and call her to an account for her murders, usurpation and tyranny, but, like her mother Jezebel, she saved them the labour, went out to meet her father, and hastened her own destruction.

1. Hearing the noise, she came in a fright to see what was the matter, ver. 13. Jehoiada, and his friends, began in silence, but now they found their strength they proclaimed what they were doing; it seems, Athaliah was ill beloved, else she had had intelligence brought her of this daring attempt before with her own ears she heard the noise; had the design been discovered before it was perfected, it might have been quashed, but now it was too late; when she heard the noise, it was strange she was so ill advised as to come herself, and, for ought appears, to come alone; sure she was not so ill-befriended as to have none to go for her, or none to go with her, but she was wretchedly infatuated by the transport both of fear and indignation she was in; whom God will destroy, he befools.

2. Seeing what was done she cried out for help, she saw the king's place by the pillar possessed by one to whom the princes and people did homage, ver. 14. and had reason to conclude her power at an end, which she knew was usurped, this made her rend her clothes, like one distracted, and cry, *Treason, treason*, come and help against the traitors; Josephus adds, that she cried to have him killed that possessed the king's place; what was now in doing was the highest justice, yet it is branded as the highest crime, she herself was the greatest traitor, and yet is first and loudest in crying treason, treason; those that are themselves most guilty, are commonly most forward to reproach others.

3. Jehoiada gave orders to put her to death, as an idolater, a usurper, and an enemy to the publick peace; care was taken, 1. That she should not be killed in the temple, or any of the courts of it, in reverence to that holy place, which must not be stained with the blood of any human sacrifice, though never so justly offered. 2. That whoever appeared for her should die with her, him that follows her, to protect or rescue her, any of her attendants that resolve to adhere to her, and will not come into the interests of their rightful sovereign, *kill with the sword*, but not unless they follow her now, ver. 15. According to these orders, she endeavouring to make her escape the back way to the palace, through the stalls, they pursued her, and there killed her, ver. 16. *So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord*: Thus give the bloody whore blood to drink, for she is worthy.

17. ¶ And Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD, and the king and the people, that they should be the LORD's people; between the king also and the people. 18. And all the people of the land went into the house of Baal, and brake it down, his altars and his images brake they in pieces throughly, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars: and the priest appointed officers over the house of the LORD. 19. And he took the rulers over hundreds, and the captains, and the guard, and all the people of the land, and they brought down the king from the house of the LORD, and came by the way of the gate of the guard to the kings house, and he sat on the thrones of the kings. 20. And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was in quiet; and they slew Athaliah with the sword beside the kings house. 21. Seven years old was Jehoash when he began to reign.

Jehoiada has now got over the hardest part of his work, when by the death of Athaliah, his young prince had his way to the throne cleared of all opposition, he is now to improve his advantages for the perfecting of the revolution, and the settling of the government.

Two things we have an account of here,

1. The good foundations he laid by an original contract, ver. 17. Now prince and people were together in God's house, as it should seem, before they stirred, he took care they should jointly covenant with God, and mutually covenant with each other, that

that they might rightly understand their duty both to God and to one another, and be firmly bound to it.

(1.) He endeavoured to settle and secure the interests of religion among them, by a covenant between them and God. King and people would then cleave most firmly to each other, when both had joined themselves to the Lord. God had already on his part promised to be their God, Jehoiada could shew them that in the book of the testimony; now the king and people on their part must covenant and agree that *they will be the Lord's people*: in this covenant the king stands upon the same level with his subjects, and is as much bound as any of them to serve the Lord. — By this engagement they renounced Baal, whom many of them had worshipped, and resigned themselves to God's government; it is well with a people, when all the changes that pass over them help to revive, strengthen, and advance the interests of religion among them. — And those are likely to prosper, who set out in the world under fresh and sensible obligations to God and their duty; by our bonds to God, the bonds of every relation are strengthened, they *first gave themselves to the Lord*, and then to us, 2 Cor. viii. 5.

(2.) He then settled both the coronation oath, and the oath of allegiance, the *pacta conventa*, between the king and the people, by which the king was obliged to govern according to law, and to protect his subjects, and they obliged while he did so to obey him, and to bear faith and true allegiance to him. Covenants are of use both to mind us of, and to bind us to those duties which we are already obliged to; it is good in all relations for the parties to understand one another fully, particularly in that between prince and subject, that the one may understand the limits of his power and prerogative, the other of his liberty and property; and never may the ancient land-marks, which our fathers have set before them, be removed.

2. The good beginnings he raised on those foundations.

(1.) Pursuant to their covenant with God they immediately abolished idolatry, which the preceding kings, in compliance with the house of Ahab, had introduced, ver. 18. *All the people of the land*, the mob got together, to shew their zeal against idolatry; and every one, now they were so well headed, would lend a hand to pull down Baal's temple, his altars, and his images; all his worshippers, it should seem, deserted him, only his priest Mattan stuck to his altar alone, though all men forsook Baal he would not, and there he was slain, the best sacrifice that ever was offered upon that altar; having destroyed Baal's temple, they appointed officers over the house of God, to see that the service of God was regularly performed by the proper person, in due time, and according to the instituted manner.

(2.) Pursuant to their covenant with one another, they expressed a mutual readiness to, and satisfaction in each other.

1. The king was brought in state to the royal palace, and sat there on the throne of judgment, *the thrones of the house of David*, ver. 19. ready to receive petitions and appeals, which he would refer it to Jehoiada to give answers to, and to give judgments upon. 2. The people rejoiced, and Jerusalem was in quiet, ver. 20. and Josephus saith they kept a feast of joy many days, making good Solomon's observation, Prov. xi. 10. *When it goes well with the righteous the city rejoiceth, and when the wicked perish there is shouting.*

C H A P. XII.

This chapter gives us the history of the reign of Joash, which doth not answer that glorious beginning of it, which we had an account of in the foregoing chapter; he was not so illustrious at forty years old as he was at seven, yet his reign is to be reckoned one of the better sort, and appears much worse in Chronicles than it doth here, 2 Chron. xxiv. for there we find the blood of one of God's prophets laid at his door; here we are only told, (1.) That he did well while Jehoiada lived, ver. 1—3. (2.) That he was careful and active to repair the temple, ver. 4—16. (3.) That after a sneaking composition with Hazael, ver. 17, 18. he died ingloriously, ver. 19—21.

1. **I**N the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash began to reign; and forty years reigned he in Jerusalem: and his mothers name was Zibiah of Beer-sheba. 2. And Jehoash did *that which was right in the sight of the LORD* all his days, wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him. 3. But the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places.

The general account here given of Joash is,

1. That he reigned forty years, and beginning his reign when he was very young might in a course of nature have continued much longer, for he was cut off when he was but forty seven years old. — ver. 1.

2. That he did that which was right, as long as Jehoiada lived to instruct him, ver. 2. Many young men have come too soon to an estate, have had wealth, and power, and liberty, before

they knew how to use it, and it has been of ill consequence to them; but against this danger Joash was well guarded, (1.) By having such a good director as Jehoiada was, so wise, and experienced, and faithful to him. (2.) By having so much wisdom as to hearken to him, and be directed by him, even when he was grown up. Note, It is a great mercy to young people, and especially to young princes and young gentlemen, to be under a good conduct; and to have those about them that will instruct them to do *that which is right in the sight of the Lord*, and they then do wisely and well for themselves, when they are willing to be counselled and ruled by such; *a child left to himself brings his mother to shame*, but a child left to such a tuition may bring himself to honour and comfort.

3. That the *high places were not taken away*, ver. 3. Up and down the country they had altars both for sacrifice and incense, to the honour of the God of Israel only, but in competition with and at least an implicit contempt of his altar at Jerusalem. These private altars, perhaps, had been more used in the late bad reigns than formerly, because it was not safe to go up to Jerusalem, nor was the temple-service performed as it should have been, and, it may be, for that reason Jehoiada connived at them, because some well meaning people were glad of them when they could not have better, and he hoped that the reforming of the temple and putting things into a good posture there, would by degrees draw people from their high places, and they would dwindle of themselves, or perhaps neither the king nor the priest had zeal enough to carry on their reformation so far, nor courage and strength enough to encounter such an inveterate usage.

4. ¶ And Jehoash said to the priests, All the money of the dedicated things that is brought into the house of the LORD, *even the money of every one that passeth the account*, the money that every man is set at, *and all the money that cometh into any mans heart, to bring into the house of the LORD*, 5. Let the priests take it to them, every man of his acquaintance, and let them repair the breaches of the house, wheresoever any breach shall be found. 6. But it was *so*, that in the three and twentieth year of king Jehoash, the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house. 7. Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and the *other* priests, and said unto them, Why repair ye not the breaches of the house? now therefore receive no *more* money of your acquaintance, but deliver it for the breaches of the house. 8. And the priests consented to receive no *more* money of the people, neither to repair the breaches of the house. 9. But Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar on the right side, as one cometh into the house of the LORD: and the priests that kept the door, put therein all the money *that was* brought into the house of the LORD. 10. And it was *so*, when they saw that *there was* much money in the chest, that the kings scribe, and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags, and told the money *that was* found in the house of the LORD. 11. And they gave the money, being told, into the hands of them that did the work, that had the oversight of the house of the LORD: and they laid it out to the carpenters and builders, that wrought upon the house of the LORD, 12. And to masons, and hewers of stone, and to buy timber, and hewed stone to repair the breaches of the house of the LORD, and for all that was laid out for the house to repair it. 13. Howbeit, there were not made for the house of the LORD, bowls of silver, snuffers, basons, trumpets, any vessels of gold, or vessels of silver, of the money *that was* brought into the house of the LORD. 14. But they gave that to the workmen, and repaired therewith the house of the LORD. 15. Moreover, they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen: for they dealt faithfully. 16. The trespass-money, and sin-money was not brought into the house of the LORD: it was the priests.

We have here an account of the repairing of the temple in the reign of Joash. —

1. It seems the temple was gone out of repair; though Solomon built it very strong, of the best materials, and in the best manner, yet in time it went to decay, and there were *breaches found in it*, ver. 5. in the roofs, or walls, or floors, the cieling, or wainscoting, or windows, or the partitions of the courts; even temples themselves are the worse for the wearing; the heavenly temple will never wax old. — Yet it was not only the teeth of time that made these breaches, the sons of Athaliah had *broken up the house of God*, 2 Chron. xxiv. 7. and out of an enmity to the

the service of the temple had damaged the buildings of it, and the priests had not taken care to repair the breaches in time, so that they went worse and worse; unworthy were those husbandmen to have this valuable vineyard let out to them upon such easy terms, who could not afford to keep the winepress in due and tenantable repair, *Matt. xxi. 33.* justly did their great Lord sue them for this permissive waste, and by his judgments recover *locum vastatum*, (as the law speaks) when this neglected temple was laid even with the ground.

2. The king himself was (as it should seem) the first and forwardest man that took care for the repair of it, we do not find that the priests complained of it, or that Jehoiada himself was active in it, but the king was zealous in the matter, (1.) Because he was king, and God expects and requires from those who have power that they use it for the maintenance and support of religion, the redress of grievances, and reparation of decays, for the exciting and engaging of ministers to do their part, and people theirs. (2.) Because the temple had been both his nursery and his sanctuary when he was a child, in a grateful remembrance of which he now appeared zealous for the honour of it; they who have experienced the comfort and benefit of religious assemblies will make the reproach of them their burthen, (*Zeph. iii. 18.*) the support of them their care, and the prosperity of them their chief joy.

3. The priests were ordered to collect money for these repairs, and to take care that the work was done; the king had the affairs of his kingdom to mind, and could not himself inspect this affair, but he employed the priests to manage it, the fittest persons, and most likely, one would think, to be hearty in it. (1.) He gave them orders for the levying of the money, of the dedicated things, they must not stay till it was paid in, but they must call for it where they knew it was due in their respective districts, either as redemption money, by virtue of the law, *Exod. xxx. 13.* or as estimation money, by virtue of the law, *Levit. xxvii. 2, 3.* or as a free-will offering, *ver. 4.* this they were to gather every man of his acquaintance, and it was supposed there was no man but had acquaintance with some or other of the priests. Note, Those we have particular acquaintance with, we should take the opportunity that gives us of exciting them to that which is good. (2.) He gave them orders for laying out the money they had levied in repairing the breaches of the house, *ver. 5.*

4. This method did not answer the intention, *ver. 6.* Little money was raised, either the priests were careless, and did not call to the people to pay in their dues, or the people had so little confidence in the priests management that they were backward to pay money into their hands; if they were distrusted without cause, it was the peoples shame; if with, it was more theirs; but what money was raised was not applied to the proper use, *the breaches of the house were not repaired*, the priests thought it might serve as well as it had done, and therefore put it off from time to time; church work uses to be slow work, but it is pity church men of all men should be slow at it. — Perhaps, what little money they raised they thought it necessary to use it for the maintenance of the priests, which must needs fall much short when ten tribes were wholly revolted, and the other two wretchedly corrupted.

5. Another method was therefore taken; the king has his heart much upon it, to have *the breaches of the house repaired*, *ver. 7.* His apostasy at last gives us cause to question whether he had as good an affection for the service of the temple as he had for the structure, many have been zealous for building and beautifying churches, and other forms of godliness, who yet have been strangers to the power of it; however, we commend his zeal, and blame him not for reproving even his tutor Jehoiada himself when he saw him remiss, and so convincing was his reproof that the priests owned themselves unworthy to be any longer employed, and consented to the taking of some other measures, and the giving up of the money they had received into other hands, *ver. 8.* It was honestly done, when they found they had not spirit to do it themselves, not to hinder other people from doing it. Another course was taken,

(1.) For raising money, *ver. 9, 10.* The money was not paid into private hands, but put into a publick chest, and then people brought it in readily, and in great abundance, not only their dues, but their free-will offerings for so good a work. — The high priest and the secretary of state counted the money out of the chest, and laid it by *in specie* for the use to which it was appropriated. — When publick distributions are made faithfully, publick contributions will be made cheerfully. The money that was given, (1.) Was dropt into the chest through a hole in the lid, past recal, to intimate that what has been once resigned to God must never be resumed; *every man as he proposeth in his heart, so let him give.* (2.) The chest was put on the right hand as they went in, which, some think, is alluded to in that rule of charity which our Saviour gives, *let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth.* But while they were getting all they could for the repair of the temple, they did not break in upon that which was the stated maintenance of the priests, *ver. 16.* the trespass-money and the sin-money which was given to them by that law, *Levit. v. 15, 16.* was reserved to them; let not the services of

the temple be starved under colour of repairing the breaches of it.

(2.) For laying out the money that was raised.

1. They did not put it into the hands of the priests, who were not versed in affairs of this nature, having other work to mind, but *into the hands of those that did the work*, or at least *had the oversight of it*, *ver. 11.* They were fittest to be intrusted with this business whose employment lay that way, *tractant fabrilis fabri*, but let not those who are called to war the holy warfare entangle themselves in the affairs of this life; they that were thus intrusted did the business, 1. Carefully, purchasing materials, and paying workmen, *ver. 12.* Business is done with expedition when those are employed in it that understand it, and know which way to go about it. 2. Faithfully, such a reputation they got for honesty that there was no occasion to examine their bills or audit their accounts; let all that are intrusted with publick money or publick work learn hence to deal faithfully, as those that know God will reckon with them whether men do or no; those that think it is no sin to cheat the government, cheat the country; or cheat the church, will be of another mind when God shall set their sins in order before them.

2. They did not lay it out in ornaments for the temple, in vessels of gold or silver, but in necessary repairs first, *ver. 13.* whence we may learn in all our expences to give that the preference which is most needful, and in dealing for the publick to deal as we would for our selves; after the repairs were finished we find the overplus turned into plate for the service of the temple, *2 Chron. xxiv. 14.*

17. ¶ Then Hazael king of Syria went up, and fought against Gath, and took it: and Hazael set his face to go up to Jerusalem. 18. And Jehoash king of Judah took all the hallowed things that Jehoshaphat, and Jehoram, and Ahaziah his fathers, kings of Judah had dedicated, and his own hallowed things, and all the gold that was found in the treasures of the house of the LORD, and in the kings house, and sent it to Hazael king of Syria, and he went away from Jerusalem. 19. ¶ And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 20. And his servants arose, and made a conspiracy, and slew Joash in the house of Millo, which goeth down to Silla. 21. For Jozachar the son of Shimeath, and Jehozabad the son of Shomer, his servants, smote him, and he died; and buried him with his fathers in the city of David, and Amaziah his son reigned in his stead.

When Joash had revolted from God, and was become both an idolater and a persecutor, the hand of the Lord went out against him, and his *last state was worse than his first.*

1. His wealth and honour became an easy prey to his neighbours. Hazael, when he had chastised Israel, *chap. x. 32.* threatened Judah and Jerusalem likewise, took Gath, a strong city, *ver. 17.* and thence intended to march with his forces against Jerusalem; the royal city, the holy city, but being sinful and corrupt, its defence was departed. Joash had neither spirit nor strength to make head against him, but gave him all the hallowed things, and all the gold that was found both in his exchequer, and in the treasures of the temple, *ver. 18.* to hire him to march another way. If it were lawful to do this for the publick safety, better part with the gold of the temple than expose the temple itself; yet, (1.) If he had not forsaken God, and forfeited his protection, his affairs had not been brought to this extremity, but he might have forced Hazael to retire. (2.) He diminished himself, and made himself very mean, lost the honour of a prince and a soldier, and of an Israelite too, in alienating the dedicated things. (3.) He impoverished himself and his kingdom. And, (4.) He tempted Hazael to come again, when he could bring home so rich a booty without striking a stroke. And it had this effect, for the next year the host of Syria, came up against Jerusalem; destroyed the prince, and plundered the city, *2 Chron. xxiv. 23, 24.*

2. His life became an easy prey to his own servants. They conspired against him, and slew him, *ver. 20, 21.* not aiming at his kingdom, for they opposed not his sons succeeding him, but to be revenged on him for some ill thing he had done; and we are told in Chronicles, that his murdering the prophet, Jehoiada's son, was the provocation. In this, how unrighteous soever they were (vengeance was not theirs, nor did it belong to them to repay) God was righteous; and this was not the only time that he let even kings know it was at their peril if they touched his anointed, and did his prophets any harm; and that when he comes to make inquisition for blood, the blood of prophets will run the account very high. — Thus fell Joash, who began in the spirit and ended in the flesh. God usually sets marks of his displeasure upon apostates, even in this life; for they, of all sinners, do most reproach the Lord.

C H A P. XIII.

This chapter brings us again to the history of the kings of Israel, and particularly of the family of Jehu. We have here an account of the reign, 1. Of his son Jehoahaz, which continued seventeen years. His bad character in general, ver. 1, 2. The trouble he was brought into, ver. 3. and the low ebb of his affairs, ver. 7. His humiliation before God, and God's compassion towards him, ver. 4, 5. and again, ver. 23. His continuance in his idolatry notwithstanding, ver. 6. His death, ver. 8, 9. 2. Of his grandson Joash, which continued sixteen years. Here is a general account of his reign in the usual form, ver. 11—13. but a particular account of the death of Elisha in his time. The kind visit the king made him, ver. 14. and the encouragement he gave the king in his wars with Syria, ver. 15—19. His death and burial, ver. 20. and a miracle wrought by his bones, ver. 21. And lastly, The advantages Joash gained against the Syrians according to his predictions, ver. 24, 25.

IN the three and twentieth year of Joash the son of Ahaziah king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned seventeen years. 2. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin, he departed not therefrom. 3. ¶ And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael, all *their* days. 4. And Jehoahaz besought the LORD, and the LORD hearkened unto him: for he saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them. 5. (And the LORD gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians: and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents, as beforetime. 6. Nevertheless, they departed not from the sins of the house of Jeroboam; who made Israel sin, *but* walked therein: and there remained the grove also in Samaria) 7. Neither did he leave of the people to Jehoahaz, but fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing. 8. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, and all that he did, and his might, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 9. And Jehoahaz slept with his fathers; and they buried him in Samaria, and Joash his son reigned in his stead.

This general account of the reign of Jehoahaz, and of the state of Israel during his seventeen years, though short, is long enough to let us see two things which are very affecting and instructive.

1. The glory of Israel raked up in the ashes, buried and lost, and turned into shame. How unlike doth Israel appear here to what it had been, and might have been! How is its crown profaned, and its honour laid in the dust!

(1.) It was the honour of Israel, that they worshipped the only living and true God, who is a Spirit, an eternal mind, and had rules, by which to worship him, of his own appointment: but by *changing the glory of their incorruptible God into the similitude of an ox*, the truth of God into a lie, they lost this honour, and levelled themselves with the nations that worshipped the work of their own hands. We find here the king *followed the sins of Jeroboam*, ver. 2. and the people departed *not from them*, but walked therein, ver. 6. There could not be a greater reproach than these two idolized calves were to a people that were instructed in the service of God, and intrusted with the lively oracles. In all the history of the ten tribes, we never find the least shock given to that idolatry, but in every reign still the calf was their god, and they separated themselves to that shame.

(2.) It was the honour of Israel, that they were taken under the special protection of heaven, God himself was their defence, the shield of their help, and the sword of their excellency. Happy wast thou, O Israel, upon this account. But here, as often before, we find them stripped of this glory, and exposed to the insults of all their neighbours. They, by their sins, provoked God to anger, and then he *delivered them into the hands of Hazael and Ben-hadad*, ver. 3. *Hazael oppressed Israel*, ver. 22. Sure never was any nation so often plucked and pillaged by their neighbours as Israel was. This they brought upon themselves by sin; when they had provoked God to pluck up their hedge, the goodness of their land did but tempt their neighbours to prey upon them. So low was Israel brought in this reign by the many depredations which the Syrians made upon them, that

the militia of the kingdom, and all the force they could bring into the field, was but *fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen*, a despicable muster, ver. 7. Are the thousands of Israel come to this? *How is the gold become dim!* The debauching of a nation, will certainly be the debasing of it.

2. Some sparks of Israel's ancient honour appearing in these ashes. It is not quite forgotten, notwithstanding all these quarrels, that this people is the Israel of God, and he the God of Israel. For,

(1.) It was the ancient honour of Israel, that they were a praying people: And here we find somewhat of that honour revived, for Jehoahaz their king, in his distress, *besought the Lord*, ver. 4. applied himself for help, not to the calves, what help could they give him? but to the Lord. It becomes kings to be beggars at God's door; and the greatest of men to be humble petitioners at the footstool of his throne. Need will drive them to it.

(2.) It was the ancient honour of Israel, that they had *God nigh unto them in all that which they called upon him for*, Deut. iv. 7. and so he was here. Though he might justly have rejected the prayer, as an abomination to him, yet *the Lord hearkened unto Jehoahaz*, and to his prayer for himself and for his people, ver. 4. and *he gave Israel a saviour*, ver. 5. not Jehoahaz himself, for all his days Hazael oppressed Israel, ver. 22. but his son, to whom, in answer to his father's prayers, God gave success against the Syrians, so that he recovered the cities which they had taken from his father, ver. 25. This gracious answer God gave to the prayer of Jehoahaz, not for his sake, or the sake of that unworthy people, but in remembrance of his covenant with Abraham, ver. 23. which in such exigencies as these, he had long since promised to have respect to, Lev. xxvi. 42. See how swift God is to shew mercy; how ready to hear prayers; how willing to find out any reason to be gracious, else he would not look so far back as that ancient covenant which Israel had so often broken, and forfeited all the benefit of. Let this invite and engage us for ever to him; and encourage even those that have forsaken him, to return and repent; for *there is forgiveness with him that he may be feared*.

10. ¶ In the thirty and seventh year of Joash king of Judah, began Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned sixteen years. 11. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD; he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin: *but* he walked therein. 12. And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, and his might wherewith he fought against Amaziah king of Judah, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 13. And Joash slept with his fathers, and Jeroboam sat upon his throne: and Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel. 14. ¶ Now Elisha was fallen sick, of his sickness whereof he died, and Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. 15. And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows: and he took unto him bow and arrows. 16. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow: and he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands. 17. And he said, Open the window eastward: and he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot: and he shot. And he said, The arrow of the LORD's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them. 18. And he said, Take the arrows: and he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground: and he smote thrice, and stayed. 19. And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldst have smitten five or six times, then hadst thou smitten Syria, till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria *but* thrice.

We have here Jehoash, or Joash the son of Jehoahaz, and grandson of Jehu, upon the throne of Israel. Probably, the house of Jehu intended some respect to the house of David, when they gave this heir-apparent to the crown the same name with him that was then king of Judah.

1. The general account here given of him and his reign, is much the same with what we have already met with, and has little in it remarkable, ver. 10—13. He was none of the worst; and yet because he kept up that ancient and politick idolatry of the house of Jeroboam, it is said, *He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord*. That one evil was enough to leave an indelible mark of infamy upon his name; for how little evil forever men saw in it, it was, *in the sight of the Lord*, a very ill thing,

thing, and we are sure that his judgment is according to truth. It is observable, how lightly the inspired penman passeth over his acts, and his might wherewith he warred, leaving it to the common historians to record them; while he takes notice only of the respect he shewed to Elisha. One good action shall make a better figure in God's book, than twenty great ones; and in his account, it gains a man a much better reputation to honour a prophet; than to conquer a king and his army.

2. The particular account of what past between him and Elisha, has several things in it remarkable.

- (1.) Elisha fell sick; *ver. 14.* Observe, 1. He lived long; for it was now about sixty years since he was first called to be a prophet. It was a great mercy to Israel, and especially to the sons of the prophets, that he was continued so long a burning and shining light. Elijah finished his testimony in a fourth part of that time. God's prophets have their day set them, some longer, others shorter, as infinite wisdom sees fit. 2. All the latter part of his time, from the anointing of Jehu, which was forty five years before Joash began his reign, we find no mention made of him, or of any thing he did, till we find him here upon his death-bed. He might be useful to the last, and yet not so famous as he had sometimes been. The time of his flourishing was less than the time of his living. Let not old people complain of obscurity, but rather be well pleased with retirement.
- 3. The Spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha, and yet he is not sent for to heaven on a fiery chariot, as Elijah was, but goes the common road out of the world, and is *visited with the visitation of all men.* If God honour some above others, who yet are not inferior to them in gifts or graces, who shall find fault? *May he not do what he will with his own?*

(2.) King Joash visited him in his sickness, and *wept over him*, *ver. 14.* This was an evidence of some good in him, that he had a value and affection for a faithful prophet; so far was he from hating and persecuting him as a troubler of Israel, that he loved and honoured him as one of the greatest blessings of his kingdom; and lamented the loss of him. There have been those who would not be obedient to the word of God, and yet have had the faithful ministers of it so manifested in their consciences, that they could not but have an honour for them. — Observe here, (1.) When the king heard of Elisha's sickness, he came to visit him, and to receive his dying counsel and blessing, and it was no disparagement to him, though a king, thus to honour one whom God honoured. Note, It may turn much to our spiritual advantage to attend the sick-beds, and death-beds of good ministers, and other good men, that we may learn to die, and may be encouraged in religion by the living comforts they have from it in a dying hour. (2.) Though Elisha was very old, had been a great while useful, and in a course of nature could not continue long; yet the king, when he saw him sick and likely to die, wept over him. The aged are most experienced, and therefore can worst be spared. In many causes, one old witness is worth ten young ones. (3.) He lamented him in the same words with which Elisha had himself lamented the removal of Elijah, *My father, my father.* It is probable he had heard or read them in that famous story. Note, Those that give just honours to the generation that goes before them, are often recompensed with the like from the generation that comes after them. He that watereth, that watereth with tears, shall be watered, shall be so watered also himself, when it comes to his own turn, *Prov. xi. 25.* (4.) This king was herein selfish, he lamented the loss of Elisha, because he was the chariots and horsemen of Israel, and therefore could be ill spared when Israel was so poor in chariots and horsemen, as we found they were, *ver. 7.* when they had in all but fifty horsemen and ten chariots. They who consider how much good men contribute to the defence of a nation, and the keeping off of God's judgments, will see cause to lament the removal of them.

(3.) Elisha gave the king great assurances of his success against the Syrians, Israel's present oppressors, and encouraged them to prosecute the war against them with vigour. Elisha was aware that therefore he was loth to part with him, because he looked upon him as the great bulwark of the kingdom against that common enemy, and depended much upon his blessings and prayers in his designs against them. Well, faith Elisha, if that be it that makes thee take on thus, let not that trouble thee, thou shalt be victorious over the Syrians, when I am in my grave: *I die, but God will surely visit you.* He has the residue of the Spirit, and can raise up other prophets to pray for you. God's grace is not tied to one hand. He can bury his workmen, and yet carry on his work.

To animate the king against the Syrians, he gives him a sign; orders him to *take bow and arrows*, *ver. 15.* to intimate to him, that in order to the deliverance of his kingdom from the Syrians, he must put himself into a military posture, and resolve to undergo the perils and fatigues of war; God would be the agent, but he must be the instrument. And that he should be successful, he gives him a token, by directing him,

1. To shoot an arrow towards Syria, *ver. 16, 17.* The king, no doubt, knew how to manage a bow better than the prophet did, and yet because the arrow now to be shot was to have its

significancy from the divine institution, as if he were now to be disciplined, he receives the words of command from the prophet. *Put thy hand upon the bow: Open the window: Shoot.* Nay, as if he had been a child that never drew a bow before, *Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands*, to signify, that in all his expeditions against the Syrians, he must look up to God for direction and strength; must reckon his own hands not sufficient for him, but go on in a dependence upon divine aid, *He teacheth my hands to war*, *Psal. xviii. 34. cxliv. 1.* The trembling hands of a dying prophet, as they signified the concurrence and communication of the power of God, gave this arrow more force than the hands of the king in his full strength. — The Syrians had made themselves masters of the country that lay eastward, *2 Kings x. 33.* Thitherward therefore the arrow is directed, and such an interpretation given by the prophet of the shooting of this arrow, though shot at rovers, as made it, 1. A commission to the king to attack the Syrians, notwithstanding their power and possession. 2. A promise of success therein. It is the *arrow of the Lord's deliverance; even the arrow of deliverance from Syria.* It is God that commands deliverance; and when he will effect, who can hinder? The arrow of deliverance is his. He shoots out his arrows, and the work is done, *Psal. xviii. 14.* *Thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek*, where they are now encamped, or where they are to have a general rendezvous of their forces, *till thou have consumed those of them that are vexatious and oppressive to thee and thy kingdom.*

2. To *strike with the arrows*, *ver. 18, 19.* The prophet having in God's name assured him of victory over the Syrians, he will now try him what improvement he will make of his victories, whether he will push them on with more zeal than Ahab did, when Ben-hadad lay at his mercy. For the trial of this, he bids him *smite with the arrows on the ground*: Believe them brought to the ground by the *arrow of the Lord's deliverance*, and laid at thy feet, and now shew me what thou wilt do at them when thou hast them down, whether thou wilt do as David did when God *gave him the necks of his enemies, beat them small as the dust before the wind*, *Psal. xviii. 40, 42.* The king shewed not that eagerness and flame which one might have expected upon this occasion, but smote thrice, and no more. Either out of foolish tenderness to the Syrians, he smote as if he were afraid of hurting them, at least of ruining them; willing to shew mercy to them that never did nor ever would shew mercy to him or his people. Or, perhaps, he smote but thrice, and very coldly, because he thought it but a silly thing, that it looked idle and childish for a king to beat the floor with his arrows; and thrice was often enough for him to play the fool merely to please the prophet. But by contemning the sign, he lost the thing signified, solely to the grief of the dying prophet, who was wroth with him, and told him, he should have smitten five or six times: Not being straitened in the power and promise of God, why should he be straitened in his own expectations and endeavours. Note, It cannot but be a trouble to good men, to see those they wish well to stand in their own light, and forsake their own mercies; to see them lose their advantages against their spiritual enemies, and so give them advantage.

20. ¶ And Elisha died, and they buried him: and the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. 21. And it came to pass as they were burying a man, that behold, they spied a band of men, and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet. 22. ¶ But Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. 23. And the LORD was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet. 24. So Hazael king of Syria died, and Ben-hadad his son reigned in his stead. 25. And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again out of the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael, the cities which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war: three times did Joash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel.

We must here attend,

1. The sepulchre of Elisha: he died in a good old age, and they buried him, and what follows shews,

(1.) What power there was in his life to keep off judgments; for as soon as he was dead, the bands of the Moabites invaded the land; not great armies to face them in the field, but roving sculking bands, that murdered and plundered by surprise. God has many ways to chastise a provoking people. The king was apprehensive of danger only from the Syrians, but behold the Moabites invade him. Trouble comes sometimes from that point whence we least feared it. The mentioning of this immediately upon the death of Elisha, intimates, That the removal of God's

God's faithful prophets, is a presage of judgments coming. When ambassadors are recalled, heralds may be expected.

(2.) What power there was in his dead body; it communicated life to another dead body, *ver. 21.* This great miracle, though very briefly related, was a mighty proof of his mission, and a confirmation of all his prophecies: It was also a plain indication of another life after this; when Elisha died, there was not an end of him, for then he could not have done this: From operation we may infer existence. By this it appeared that the Lord was still the God of Elisha, therefore Elisha still lived, for *he is not the God of the dead, but of the living.* And it may, perhaps, have a reference to Christ, by whose death and burial the grave is made to all believers a safe and happy passage to life. It likewise intimated, that though Elisha was dead, yet in the virtue of the promises made by him, Israel's interests, though they seemed quite sunk and lost, should revive and flourish again. The neighbours were carrying the dead body of a man to the grave, and fearing to fall into the hands of the Moabites, a party of whom they saw at a distance near the place where the body was to be interr'd, they laid the corps in the next convenient place, which proved to be Elisha's sepulchre. The dead man upon the touch of his bones revived, and, it is likely, went home again with his friends. Josephus relates the story otherwise; That some thieves having robbed and murdered an honest traveller, threw his dead body into Elisha's grave, and it immediately revived. Elijah was honoured in his departure, Elisha was honoured after his departure. God thus dispenseth honours as he pleaseth, but one way or other the rest of all the saints will be glorious, *Isa. xi. 10.* It is good being near the saints, and having our lot with them both in life and death.

2. The sword of Joash king of Israel; and we find it successful against the Syrians.

(1.) The cause of his success was God's favour, *ver. 23.* *The Lord was gracious to them, had compassion on them* in their miseries, and *respect unto them.* The several expressions here of the same import, call upon us to observe and admire the triumphs of divine goodness in the deliverance of such a provoking people. It was of the Lord's mercies that they were not consumed; because he would not destroy them as yet. He foresaw they would destroy themselves at last, but as yet he would relieve them, and give them space to repent. The slowness of God's processes against sinners must be construed to the advancement of his mercy, not the impeachment of his justice.

(2.) The effect of his success was Israel's benefit. He recovered out of the hands of Ben-hadad the cities of Israel which the Syrians were possessed of, *ver. 25.* This was a great kindness to the cities themselves, which were hereby brought from under the yoke of oppression; and to the whole kingdom, which was much strengthened by the reduction of those cities. Thrice Joash beat the Syrians, just as oft as he had struck the ground with the arrows, and then a full stop was put to the course of his victories. Many have repented, when it was too late, of their distrust, and the straitness of their desires.

C H A P. XIV.

This chapter continues the history of the succession in the kingdoms both of Judah and Israel. (1.) In the kingdom of Judah, here is the entire history (as much as is recorded in this book) of Amaziah's reign; his good character, ver. 1—4. The justice he executed on the murderers of his father, ver. 5, 6. His victory over the Edomites, ver. 7. His war with Joash, and his defeat in that war, ver. 8—14. And his fall at last by a conspiracy against him, ver. 17—20. And the beginning of the history of Azariah, ver. 21, 22. (2.) In the kingdom of Israel, the conclusion of the reign of Joash, ver. 15, 16. And the entire history of Jeroboam his son, the second of that name, ver. 23—29. How many great men are made to stand in a little compass in God's book.

IN the second year of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel, reigned Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah. 2. He was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem: and his mothers name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. 3. And he did *that which was right* in the sight of the LORD, yet not like David his father: he did according to all things as Joash his father did. 4. Howbeit, the high places were not taken away: as yet the people did sacrifice, and burnt incense on the high places. 5. ¶ And it came to pass as soon as the kingdom was confirmed in his hand, that he slew his servants which had slain the king his father. 6. But the children of the murderers he slew not: according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses, wherein the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for

his own sin. 7. He slew of Edom in the valley of salt, ten thousand, and took Selah by war, and called the name of it Joktheel, unto this day.

Amaziah is the king whom here we have an account of, the son and successor of Joash: Let us take a view of him,

1. In the temple; and there he did tolerably well, like Joash, but not like David, *ver. 3.* He began well, but did not persevere. He *did that which was right in the sight of the Lord*, kept up his attendance on God's altars, and his attention to God's word, yet not like David. It is not enough to do that which our pious predecessors did, merely to keep up the usage, but we must do it as they did it, from the same principle of faith and devotion, and with the same sincerity and resolution. It is here taken notice of as before, that *the high places were not taken away*, *ver. 4.* It is hard to get clear of those corruptions, which by long usage have gained both prescription, and a favourable opinion.

2. On the bench; and there we have him doing justice on the traitors that murdered his father; not as soon as ever he came to the crown, lest it should have occasioned some disturbance, but he prudently deferred it till *the kingdom was confirmed in his hand*, *ver. 5.* To weaken a factious party gradually, when it is not safe to provoke, often proves the way to ruin it effectually. Justice strikes surely by striking slowly, and is often executed most prudently, when it is not executed presently. Wisdom here is profitable to direct. Amaziah did thus, (1.) According to the rule of the law, that ancient rule, that *he that sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.* Never let traitors or murderers expect to come to their graves like other men: *Let them flee to the pit, and let no man stay them.* 2. Under the limitation of the law. *The children of murderers he slew not*, because the law of Moses had expressly provided that *the children should not be put to death for the fathers*, *ver. 6.* It is probable, this is taken notice of, because there were those about him that advised him to that rigour, both in revenge, because the crime was extraordinary, the murder of a king; and in policy, that the children might not plot against him in revenge of their father's death. But against these insinuations he opposed the express law of God, *Deut. xxiv. 16.* which he was to judge by, and which he resolved to adhere to, and trust God with the issue. God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, because every man is guilty before him, and owes him a death; so that if he require the life for the father's sin, he doth no wrong, the sinner having forfeited it already by his own: But he doth not allow earthly princes to do thus, the children before them are innocent, and therefore must not suffer as guilty.

3. In the field; and there we find him triumphing over the Edomites, *ver. 7.* Edom had revolted from under the hand of Judah in Jorani's time, *chap. viii. 22.* now he makes war upon them to bring them back to their allegiance, kills ten thousand, and takes the chief city of Arabia the stony, called Selah, a rock, and gave it a new name. We shall find a larger account of this expedition, *2 Chron. xxv. 5, &c.*

8. ¶ Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu king of Israel, saying, Come, let us look one another in the face. 9. And Jehoash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, The thistle that was in Lebanon, sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle. 10. Thou hast indeed smitten Edom, and thine heart hath lifted thee up: glory of this, and tarry at home: for why shouldst thou meddle to thy hurt, that thou shouldst fall, even thou, and Judah with thee? 11. But Amaziah would not hear: therefore Jehoash king of Israel went up, and he, and Amaziah king of Judah looked one another in the face at Beth-sheMesh, which belongeth to Judah. 12. And Judah was put to the worse before Israel, and they fled every man to their tents. 13. And Jehoash king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash the son of Ahaziah, at Beth-sheMesh, and came to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, from the gate of Ephraim, unto the corner gate, four hundred cubits. 14. And he took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the kings house, and hostages, and returned to Samaria.

For several successions after the division of the kingdoms, that of Judah suffered much by the enmity of Israel. After Aha's time, for several successions, it suffered more by the friendship of Israel, and by the alliance and affinity they made with them: But now we meet with hostility between them again, which had not been of some ages before.

1. Amaziah, upon no provocation, and without shewing any cause of quarrel, challengeth Joash into the field, *ver. 8. Come, let us look one another in the face*; let us try our strength in battle. Had he challenged him to a personal duel only, the error had remained with himself, but each must bring all their forces into the field, and thousands of lives on both sides must be sacrificed to his capricious humour. Hereby he shewed himself proud, presumptuous, and prodigal of blood. Some think he intended to avenge the injury, which the dismissed, disgusted Israelites had lately done to his country in their return, *2 Chron. xxv. 13.* and that he had also the vanity to think of subduing the kingdom of Israel, and reuniting it to Judah. *A fool's lips thus enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes.* They that challenge, are chargeable with that beginning of strife, which is as the letting forth of water. He that is fond either to fight, or to go to law, may perhaps have enough of it quickly, and be the first that repents it.

2. Joash sends him a grave rebuke for his challenge, with advice to withdraw it, *ver. 9, 10.* 1. He mortifies his pride, by comparing himself to a cedar, a stately tree, and Amaziah to a thistle, a sorry weed; telling him, he was so far from fearing him, that he despised him; and scorned as much to have any thing to do with him, or make any alliance with him, as the cedar would to match his daughter to a thistle. The ancient house of David he thinks not worthy to be named the same day with the house of Jehu, though an upstart. How can a humble man smile to hear two proud and scornful men set their wits on work, to vilify and undervalue one another! — 2. He foretels his fall, *a wild beast tread down the thistle*, and so put an end to his treaty with the cedar; so easily doth Joash think his forces can crush Amaziah, and so unable doth he think him to make any resistance. — 3. He shews him the folly of his challenge, *Thou hast indeed smitten Edom*, a weak, unarmed, undisciplined body of men, and therefore thinkest thou canst carry all before thee, and subdue the regular forces of Israel with as much ease; *thine heart has lifted thee up*; see where the root of all sin lies, it is in the heart, thence it flows, and that must bear the blame; it is not providence, the event, the occasion, whatever it is, that makes men proud, or secure, or discontented, or the like, but it is their own heart that doth it, thou art proud of the blow thou hast given to Edom, as if that had made thee formidable to all mankind; those wretchedly deceive themselves that magnify their own performances, and because they have been blessed with some little success and reputation, conclude themselves fit for any thing, and no less sure of it. 4. He counsels him to be content with the honour he had won, and not to hazard that, by grasping at more that was out of his reach: *Why shouldst thou meddle to thy hurt?* as fools often do that will be meddling, *Prov. xx. 3.* Many had had wealth and honour enough, if they had but known when they had enough; he warns him of the consequence, that it would be fatal not to himself only, but to his kingdom, which he ought to protect.

3. Amaziah persisted in his resolution, and the issue was bad, he had better have tarried at home, for Joash gave him such a look in the face as to put him to confusion; challengers commonly prove to be on the losing side. 1. His army was routed and dispersed, *ver. 12.* Josephus saith, when they were to engage, they were struck with such a terror that they did not strike a stroke, but every one made the best of his way. 2. He himself was taken prisoner by the king of Israel, and then had enough of *looking him in the face*. Amaziah's pedigree comes in here somewhat abruptly, *the son of Joash, the son of Amaziah*, because, perhaps, he had gloried in the dignity of his ancestors, or now smarted for their iniquity. 3. The conqueror entered Jerusalem, which tamely opened to him, and yet he broke down their wall, (and, as Josephus saith, drove his chariot in triumph through the breach) in reproach to them, and that he might, when he pleased, take possession of the royal city. 4. He plundered Jerusalem, took away all that was valuable, and returned to Samaria laden with spoils, *ver. 14.* It was said of Joash, that he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and of Amaziah, that he did that which was right, and yet Joash triumphs thus over Amaziah, and why so? Because God would shew in Amaziah's fate that he resists the proud, or because, whatever they were otherwise, Joash had lately been respectful to one of God's prophets, *chap. xiii. 14.* but Amaziah had been abusive to another, *2 Chron. xxv. 16.* and God will honour those that honour him in his prophets, but those who despise them, and him in them, shall be lightly esteemed.

15. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash which he did, and his might, and how he fought with Amaziah king of Judah, *are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?* 16. And Jehoash slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel, and Jeroboam his son reigned in his stead. 17. ¶ And Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, lived after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz

king of Israel, fifteen years. 18. And the rest of the acts of Amaziah, *are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?* 19. Now they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem: and he fled to Lachish, but they sent after him to Lachish, and slew him there. 20. And they brought him on horses; and he was buried at Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David. 21. And all the people of Judah took Azariah (which was sixteen years old) and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. 22. He built Elath, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers.

Here is three kings brought to their graves in these few verses.

1. Joash king of Israel, *ver. 15, 16.* We attended his funeral once before, *chap. xiii. 12, 13.* But because the historian had occasion to give a farther account of his life and actions, he again mentions his death and burial.

2. Amaziah king of Judah; fifteen years he survived his conqueror the king of Israel, *ver. 17.* A man may live a great while after he has been shamed, may be soundly mortified, (as Amaziah, no doubt, was) and yet not dead; his acts are said to be found written in his annals, *ver. 18.* but not his might, for his cruelty when he was a conqueror over the Edomites, and his insolence when he challenged the king of Israel, shewed him void of true courage. — He was slain by his own subjects, who hated him for his male-administration, *ver. 19.* made Jerusalem too hot for him, the ignominious breach made in their walls, being occasioned by his folly and presumption; he fled to Lachish; how long he continued concealed or sheltered there we are not told, but at last he was there murdered, *ver. 19.* No further did the rage of the rebels extend, for they brought him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him there among his ancestors.

3. Azariah succeeded Amaziah, but not till twelve years after his father's death, for Amaziah died in the fifteenth year of Jeroboam, as appears by comparing *ver. 23.* with *ver. 1.* but Azariah did not begin his reign till the twenty seventh of Jeroboam, *chap. xxv. 1.* for he was but four years old at the death of his father, so that for twelve years, till he came to be sixteen, the government was in the hands of protectors; he reigned very long, *chap. xxv. 2.* and yet the account of his reign is here industriously huddled up, and broken off abruptly, *ver. 22.* He built Elath, which had belonged to the Edomites, but, it is probable, was recovered by his father, *ver. 7.* after that the king slept with his fathers, as if that had been all he did that was worth mentioning, or rather, it is meant of king Amaziah, he did it soon after he died.

23. ¶ In the fifteenth year of Amaziah, the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, and reigned forty and one years. 24. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. 25. He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath, unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher. 26. For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter: for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel. 27. And the LORD said not that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven: but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash. 28. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he warred, and how he recovered Damascus, and Hamath, which belonged to Judah, for Israel, *are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?* 29. And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, even with the kings of Israel; and Zachariah his son reigned in his stead.

Here is an account of the reign of Jeroboam the second, I doubt it is an indication of the affection and adherence of the house of Jehu, to the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, that they called an heir apparent to the crown by his name, thinking that an honourable name, which in the book of God is infamous, and stigmatized, as much as any other.

1. His reign was long, the longest of all the reigns of the kings of Israel, he reigned forty one years, yet his cotemporary Azariah, the king of Judah, reigned longer, even fifty two years; this Jeroboam reigned just as long as Aza had done, *1 Kings xv. 10.* yet one did that which was good, and the other that

that which was evil. — We cannot measure mens characters by the length of their lives, or of their outward prosperity; *there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked.*

2. His character was the same with that of the rest of those kings, *he did that which was evil*, ver. 24. *for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam*, he kept up the worship of the calves, and never left that, thinking there was no harm in it, because it had been the way of all his ancestors and predecessors, but a sin is never the less evil in God's sight, whatever it is in ours, for its being an ancient usage; and a frivolous plea it will be against doing good, that we have been accustomed to do evil.

3. Yet he prospered more than most of them, for though in that one thing, he did evil in the sight of the Lord, yet, it is likely, in other respects, there was some good found in him, and therefore God owned him,

(1.) By prophecy; he raised up Jonah the son of Amittai, a Galilean, (so much were they mistaken, that said out of Galilee ariseth no prophet, John vii. 52.) and by him intimated the purposes of his favour to Israel, notwithstanding their provocations, encouraged him and his kingdom to take up arms for the recovery of their ancient possessions, and (which would contribute no little to their success) assured them of victory; it is a sign God has not cast off his people, if he continue faithful ministers among them; when Elisha was gone, that strengthened the hands of Joash, Jonah was sent to encourage his son; happy is the land that hath a succession of prophets running parallel with a succession of princes, that the word of the Lord may endure for ever; of this Jonah we read much in that little book of scripture that bears his name; it is probable, it was when he was a young man, and fit for such an expedition, that God sent him to Nineveh, and that it was when he had yet been but a little conversant with the visions of God, that he flew off and fretted as he did; and if so, this is an undoubted evidence of the forgiveness of his faults and follies, that he was afterwards employed as a messenger of mercy to Israel. A commission amounts to a pardon, and he that had himself found mercy, notwithstanding his provocations, could the better encourage them with the hope of mercy notwithstanding theirs; some that have been foolish and passionate, and have gone about their work very awkwardly at first, yet afterwards have proved useful and eminent; men must not be thrown away for every fault.

2. By providence; the event was according to the word of the Lord, his arms were successful, he restored the coast of Israel, recovered those frontier towns and countries that lay from Hamath in the north to the sea of the plain, i. e. the sea of Sodom in the south, all which the Syrians had possessed themselves of, ver. 25. Two reasons are here given why God blessed them with those victories, (1.) Because their distress was very great, which made them the objects of his compassion, ver. 26. Though he saw not any signs of their repentance and reformation, yet *he saw their affliction that it was very bitter*; they that lived in those countries which the enemies were masters of, were miserably oppressed and enslaved, and could call nothing their own; the rest, we may suppose, much impoverished by the frequent incursions the enemy made upon them to plunder them, and continually frightened with their alarms, so that there was none shut up or left, both towns and countries were laid waste and stripped of their wealth, and no helper appeared: to this extremity were they reduced in many parts of the country in the beginning of Jeroboam's reign, when God, in meer pity to them, heard the cry of their affliction, (for no mention is made here of the cry of their prayers) and wrought this deliverance for them by the hand of Jeroboam; let those whose case is piteous take comfort from the divine pity; we read of God's bowels of mercy, *Isa. lxxiii. 15. Jer. xxxi. 20.* and that he is full of compassion, *Psal. lxxxvi. 15.* — 2. Because the decree was not yet gone forth for their utter destruction; he had not as yet said *he would blot out the name of Israel*, ver. 27. and because he had not said it, he would not do it; if it be understood of the dispersion of the ten tribes, he did say it, and do it not long after, reprieves are not pardons; if of the utter extirpation of the name of Israel, he never said it, nor will ever do it, for that name still remains under heaven in the gospel Israel, and will to the end of time; and because they at present bare that name, which was to have this lasting honour, he shewed them this favour, as well as for the sake of the ancient honour of that name, *chap. xiii. 23.*

Lastly, Here is the conclusion of Jeroboam's reign, we read, ver. 28. of his might, and how he warred, but ver. 29. *he slept with his fathers*, for the mightiest must yield to death, and there is no discharge in that war.

Many prophets there had been in Israel, a constant succession of them in every age, but none of the prophets had left any of their prophecies in writing till those of this age began to do it, and their prophecies are part of the canon of scripture; it was in the reign of this Jeroboam, that Hosea (who continued very long a prophet) began to prophesy, and he was the first that wrote his prophecies, therefore the word of the Lord by him is called *the beginning of the word of the Lord*, *Hos. i. 2.* Then that part of the word of the Lord began to be written; at the same time Amos prophesied, and wrote his prophecy; soon after

Micah, and then Isaiah in the days of Ahaz and Hezekiah; thus God never left himself without witness, but in the darkest and most degenerate ages of the church raised up some to be burning and shining lights in it, to their own age by their preaching and living, and a few by their writings to reflect light upon us, on whom the ends of the world are come.

C H A P. XV.

In this chapter, 1. The history of two of the kings of Judah is briefly recorded, (1.) Of Azariah, alias Uzziah, ver. 1—7. (2.) Of Jotham his son, ver. 32—38. 2. The history of many of the kings of Israel that reigned at the same time, is given us in short, five in succession, who all of them but one went down slain to the pit, and their murderers were their successors. 1. Zechariah, the last of the house of Jehu, reigned six months, and then was slain, and succeeded by Shallum, ver. 8—12. 2. Shallum reigned one month, and then was slain, and succeeded by Menahem, ver. 13—15. 3. Menahem reigned ten years, or tyrannized rather, such his barbarous cruelty, ver. 16. and unreasonable exactions, ver. 20. and then died in his bed, and left his son to succeed him first, and then suffer for him, ver. 16—22. 4. Pekahiah reigned two years, and then was slain, and succeeded by Pekah, ver. 23—26. 5. Pekah reigned twenty years, and then was slain, and succeeded by Hoshea, the last of all the kings of Israel, ver. 27—31. for towards the final destruction of that kingdom, things were now working and hastning apace.

1. **I**N the twenty and seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel, began Azariah son of Amaziah king of Judah to reign. 2. Sixteen years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned two and fifty years in Jerusalem, and his mothers name was Jecholiah of Jerusalem. 3. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done; 4. Save that the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burnt incense still on the high places. 5. ¶ And the LORD smote the king, so that he was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house: and Jotham the kings son was over the house, judging the people of the land. 6. And the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 7. So Azariah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David; and Jotham his son reigned in his stead.

This is a short account of the reign of Azariah.

1. Most of it is general, and the same that has been given of others, he began young, and reigned long, ver. 2. did that which was right for the most part, ver. 3. It was happy for the kingdom, that a good reign was a long one, only he had not zeal and courage enough to take away the high places, ver. 4.

2. That which is peculiar, ver. 5. that God smote him with a leprosy, is more largely related, with the occasion of it, 2 Chron. xxvi. 16, &c. where we have also a fuller account of the glories of the former part of his reign as well as of the disgraces of the latter part of it. — He did that which was right, as Amaziah had done, like him he begun well, but failed before he finished. — Here we are told, (1.) That he was a leper, the greatest of men are not only subject to the common calamities, because to the common infirmities of the human nature, but if they be guilty of any heinous sin, lie as open as the meanest to the most grievous strokes of divine vengeance. (2.) God smote him with this leprosy to chastise him for his presumptuous invasion of the priests office; if great men be proud men, some way or other God will humble them, and make them know he is both above them and against them, for he resisteth the proud. — (3.) That he was a leper to the day of his death; though we have reason to think he repented and the sin was pardoned, yet, for warning to others, he was continued under this mark of God's displeasure as long as he lived, and perhaps it was for the good of his soul that he was so. (4.) That he dwelt in a several house, as being made ceremonially unclean by the law, to the discipline of which, though a king, he must submit; he that presumptuously intruded into God's temple, and pretended to be a priest, is justly shut out from his own palace, and shut up as a prisoner or recluse ever after; we suppose his several house made as convenient and agreeable as might be; some translate it a free-house, where he had liberty to take his pleasure, but however it was a great mortification to one that had been so much a man of honour and a man of business as he had been; to be cut off from society, and dwell always in a several house, would almost make life itself a burthen, even to kings, though they have never any to converse with but their inferiors, the most contemplative men would soon be weary of it. (5.) That his son was his vice-roy in the affairs both

both of his court, *he was over the house*, and of his kingdom, he was *judging the people of the land*; and it was both a comfort to him and a blessing to his kingdom that he had such a son to fill up his room.

8. ¶ In the thirty and eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, did Zechariah the son of Jeroboam reign over Israel in Samaria six months. 9. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD, as his fathers had done: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. 10. And Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and smote him before the people, and slew him, and reigned in his stead. 11. And the rest of the acts of Zechariah, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. 12. This was the word of the LORD which he spake unto Jehu, saying, Thy sons shall sit on the throne of Israel unto the fourth generation. And so it came to pass. 13. ¶ Shallum the son of Jabesh began to reign in the nine and thirtieth year of Uzziah king of Judah, and he reigned a full month in Samaria. 14. For Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah, and came to Samaria, and smote Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria, and slew him, and reigned in his stead. 15. And the rest of the acts of Shallum, and his conspiracy which he made, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. 16. ¶ Then Menahem smote Tiphshah, and all that were therein, and the coasts thereof from Tirzah: because they opened not to him, therefore he smote it, and all the women therein that were with child, he ripped up. 17. In the nine and thirtieth year of Azariah king of Judah, began Menahem the son of Gadi to reign over Israel, and reigned ten years in Samaria. 18. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD: he departed not all his days from the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. 19. And Pul the king of Assyria came against the land: and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him, to confirm the kingdom in his hand. 20. And Menahem exacted the money of Israel, *even* of all the mighty men of wealth, of each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria: so the king of Assyria turned back, and stayed not there in the land. 21. ¶ And the rest of the acts of Menahem, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 22. And Menahem slept with his fathers, and Pekahiah his son reigned in his stead. 23. ¶ In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekahiah the son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned two years. 24. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD, he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. 25. But Pekah the son of Remaliah, a captain of his, conspired against him, and smote him in Samaria, in the palace of the king's house, with Argob, and Arioh, and with him fifty men of the Gileadites: and he killed him, and reigned in his room. 26. And the rest of the acts of Pekahiah, and all that he did, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. 27. ¶ In the two and fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekah the son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned twenty years. 28. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD, he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. 29. In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel-beth-mazach, and Janoah, and Kadesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria. 30. And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son Remaliah, and smote him, and slew him, and reigned in his stead, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah. 31. And the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

The best days of the kingdom of Israel were while the government was in Jehu's family, in his reign and the next three, though there were many abominable corruptions and miserable

grievances in Israel, yet the crown went in succession, the kings died in their beds, and some care was taken of publick affairs, but now those days are at an end, the history which we have in these verses, of about thirty three years, represents the affairs of that kingdom in the utmost confusion imaginable; wo to them that are with child, (*ver.* 16.) and to them which gave suck in those days, for then must needs be great tribulations, when, for the transgression of the land, many were the princes thereof.

1. Let us observe something in general concerning these unhappy revolutions, and the calamities which must needs attend them, these bad times, as they may truly be called.

(1.) God had tried the people of Israel both with judgments and mercies, explained, and the calls of them enforced by his servants the prophets, and yet they continued impenitent and unreformed, and therefore God justly brought these miseries upon them, as Moses had warned them, if ye will yet walk contrary to me, I will punish you yet seven times more, *Lev.* xxvi. 21, &c.

(2.) God made good his promise to Jehu, That his sons to the fourth generation after him should sit upon the throne of Israel; which was a greater favour than was shewed to any of the royal families either before or after his.—God had said it should be so, *chap.* x. 30. and we are told in this chapter, *ver.* 12. that so it came to pass; see how punctual God is to his promises, these calamities God long designed for Israel, and they deserved them, yet they were not inflicted till that word had taken effect to the full; thus God rewarded Jehu for his zeal in destroying the worship of Baal and the house of Ahab; and yet when the measure of the sins of the house of Jehu was full, God avenged upon it the blood then shed, called the blood of Jezreel, *Hos.* i. 4.

(3.) All these kings did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, for they walked in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat; though at variance with one another, yet in this they agreed, to keep up idolatry, and the people loved to have it so, though they were emptied from vessel to vessel, that taste remained in them, and that scent was not changed; it was sad indeed when their government was so often altered, and yet never for the better, that among all those contending interests, none of them should think it as much their interest to destroy the calves as others had done to support them.

(4.) Each of these (except one) conspired against his predecessor and slew him, Shallum, Menahem, Pekah, and Hoshea, all traitors and murderers, and yet all kings awhile, one of them ten, another twenty, another nine years, for God may suffer wickedness to prosper, and to carry away the wealth and honours a while, but sooner or later blood shall have blood, and he that dealt treacherously shall be dealt treacherously with; one wicked man is oft made a scourge to another, and every wicked man at length a ruin to himself.

(5.) The ambition of the great men made the nation miserable; here is Tiphshah, a city of Israel, barbarously destroyed, with all the coasts thereof, by one of these pretenders, *ver.* 16. and, no doubt, it was through blood that each of them waded to the throne, nor could any of these kings perish alone; no land can have greater pests, nor Israel worse troubles, than such men as care not how much the welfare and repose of their country is sacrificed to their revenge and affectation of dominion.

(6.) While the nation was thus shattered by divisions at home, the kings of Assyria, first one, *ver.* 19. and then another, *ver.* 29. came against it, and did what they pleased; nothing doth more towards the making of a nation an easy prey to a common enemy than intestine broils, and contests for the sovereignty, happy the land where that is settled.

(7.) This was the condition of Israel just before they were quite ruined, and carried away captives, for that was done in the ninth year of Hoshea, the last of these usurpers; if they had in these days of confusion and perplexity humbled themselves before God, and sought his face, that final destruction might have been prevented, but when God judgeth he will overcome; these factions, the fruit of an evil spirit sent among them, hastened that captivity, for a kingdom thus divided against it self will soon come to desolation.

2. Let us take a short view of the particular reigns.

1. Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam, began to reign in the thirty eighth year of Azariah, or Uzziah, king of Judah, *ver.* 8. Some of the most critical chronologers reckon that between Jeroboam and his son Zechariah, the throne was vacant twenty two years, others eleven years, through the disturbances and dissensions that were in the kingdom, and then it was not strange that Zechariah was deposed before he was well warm in the throne, he reigned but six months, and then Shallum slew him before the people, perhaps, as Caesar was slain in the senate, or he put him to death publicly as a criminal, with the approbation of the people, to whom he had some way or other made himself odious; so ended the line of Jehu.

2. But had Shallum peace who slew his master? No, he had not, *ver.* 13. one month of days measured his reign, and then he was cut off; perhaps to this the prophet, who then lived, refers, *Hos.* v. 7. Now shall a month devour them with their portions. That dominion seldom lasts long, which is founded in

in blood and falsehood. — Menahem, either provoked by his crime, or animated by his example, soon served him as he had served his master, *slew him, and reigned in his stead*, ver. 14. probably he was general of the army, which then lay encamped at Tirzah, and hearing Shallum's treason and usurpation hastened to avenge it, as Omri did Zimri in a like case, 1 Kings xvi. 17.

3. Menahem held the kingdom ten years, ver. 17. But whereas we have heard that the *kings of the house of Israel were merciful kings*, (1 Kings xx. 31.) This Menahem, (the scandal of his country) was so prodigiously cruel to those of his own nation that boggled a little at submitting to him, that he not only ruined a city, and the coasts thereof, but, forgetting that he himself was born of a woman, *ripped up all the women with child*, ver. 16. We may well wonder that ever it should enter into the heart of any man to be so barbarous, and to be so perfectly lost to humanity itself. — By these cruel methods he hoped to strengthen himself, and to frighten all others into his interests, but it seems he did not gain his point, for when the king of Assyria came against him, (1.) So little confidence had he in his people that he durst not meet him as an enemy, but was obliged at a vast expence to purchase a peace with him. (2.) Such need had he of help to confirm the kingdom in his hand, that he made it part of his bargain with him, (a bargain which, no doubt, the king of Assyria knew how to make a good hand of another time) that he should assist him against his own subjects that were disaffected to him. — The money wherewith he purchased his friendship was a vast sum, no less than a thousand talents of silver, ver. 19. which Menahem exacted, it is probable, by military execution of all the mighty men of wealth, very considerably sparing the poor, and laying the burthen, (as was fit) on those that were best able to bear it, and being raised it was given to the king of Assyria, as pay for his army, fifty shekels of silver for each man in it; thus he got clear of the king of Assyria for this time, he stayed not to quarter in the land, ver. 20. but his army now got so rich a booty with so little ado, that it encouraged them to come again not long after, when they laid all waste; thus was he the betrayer of his country, that should have been the protector of it.

4. Pekahiah, the son of Menahem, succeeded his father, but reigned only two years, and then was treacherously slain by Pekah, falling under the load both of his own and of his father's wickedness. — It is repeated concerning him, as before, that he *departed not from the sins of Jeroboam*: Still that is mentioned, to shew that God was righteous in bringing that destruction upon them, which came not long after, because they hated to be reformed, ver. 24. Pekah, it seems, had some persons of figure in his interest, two of them are here named, ver. 25. and with their help he compassed his design.

5. Pekah, though he got the kingdom by treason, kept it twenty years, ver. 27. so long it was before his violent dealing returned upon his own head, but it returned at last; this Pekah, son of Remaliah, (1.) Made himself more considerable abroad than any of these usurpers, for he was even in the latter end of his time, (in the reign of Ahaz, which began in his seventeenth year) a great terror to the kingdom of Judah as we find, Isa. vii. 1, &c. (2.) He lost part of his kingdom to the king of Assyria, several cities are here named, ver. 29. which were taken from him, all the land of Gilead, on the other side Jordan, and Galilee in the north, containing the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulon, were seized, and the inhabitants carried captive into Assyria; by this judgment God punished him for his attempt upon Judah and Jerusalem; it was then foretold, that within two or three years after he made that attempt, before a child then born should be able to cry my father and my mother, the riches of Samaria should be taken away before the king of Assyria, Isa. viii. 4. and here we have the accomplishment of that prediction. — (3.) Soon after this he left his life to the resentments of his country, who, it is probable, were disgusted at him for leaving them exposed to a foreign enemy while he was invading Judah; this Hoshea took advantage of, and to gain his crown seized his life, *slew him, and reigned in his stead*; sure he was fond of a crown indeed that at this time would run such a mighty hazard as a traitor doth, for the crown of Israel; now it had lost the choicest of its flowers and jewels, was lined more than ever with thorns, had of late been fatal to all the heads that had worn it, was forfeited to divine justice, and now ready to be laid in the dust, a crown which a wise man would not have taken up in the street, yet Hoshea not only ventures upon it, but ventures for it, and it cost him dear.

32. ¶ In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel, began Jotham the son of Uzziah king of Judah to reign. 33. Five and twenty years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: and his mothers name was Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok. 34. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD: he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done, 35. ¶ Howbeit, the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burnt incense still in the high places: he built the higher gate

of the house of the LORD. 36. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 37. (In those days the LORD began to send against Judah, Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah) 38. And Jotham slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father, and Ahaz his son reigned in his stead.

We have here a short account of the reign of Jotham king of Judah, of whom we are told,

1. That he reigned very well, *did that which was right in the sight of the Lord*, ver. 34. Josephus gives him a very high character, that he was pious towards God, just towards men, and laid out himself for the publick good; that whatever was amiss, he took care to have it rectified; and, in short, wanted no virtue that became a good prince. Though the high places were not taken away, yet to draw people from them, and keep them close to God's holy place, he shewed great respect to the temple, and built the higher gate which he went through to the temple. If magistrates cannot do all they would for the suppressing of vice and profaneness, let them do so much the more for the support and advancement of piety and virtue, and bringing of them into reputation. If they cannot pull down the high places of sin, yet let them build and beautify the high gate of God's house.

2. That he died in the midst of his days, ver. 33. Of most of the kings of Judah we are told how old they were when they began their reign, and by that may compute how old they were when they died; but no account is kept of the age of any of the kings of Israel (that I remember) only of the years of their reigns. This honour God would put upon the kings of the house of David above those of other families. And by these accounts it appears there was none of all the kings of Judah that reached David's age, seventy, the common age of man. Aza's age I do not find, Uzziah lived to be sixty eight, Manasseh sixty seven, and Jehoshaphat sixty; and these were the three oldest; many of them that were of note, did not reach fifty. This Jotham here died at forty one. He was too great a blessing to be continued long to such an unworthy people. His death was a judgment, especially considering the character of his son and successor.

3. That in his days the confederacy was formed against Judah by Rezin and Remaliah's son, the king of Syria, and king of Israel, which appeared so very formidable in the beginning of the reign of Ahaz, that upon notice of it, the heart of that prince was moved, and *the heart of the people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind*, Isa. vii. 2. The confederates were unjust in the attempt, yet it is here said, ver. 37. *The Lord began to send them against Judah*, as he bid Shimei curse David, and took away from Job what the Sabeans robbed him of. Men are God's hand, the sword, the rod in his hand, which he makes use of as he pleaseth, to serve his own righteous counsels, though men be unrighteous in their intentions. This storm gathered in the reign of pious Jotham, but he came to his grave in peace, and it fell upon his degenerate son.

CHAP. XVI.

This chapter is wholly taken up with the reign of Ahaz; and we have even enough of it, unless it were better. He had a good father, and a better son, and yet was himself one of the worst of the kings of Judah. (1.) He was a notorious idolater, ver. 1—4. (2.) With the treasures of the temple, as well as his own, he hired the king of Assyria to invade Syria and Israel, ver. 5—9. (3.) He took pattern from an idol's altar he saw at Damascus for a new altar in God's temple, ver. 10—16. (4.) He abused and embezzled the furniture of the temple, ver. 17, 18. And so his story ends, ver. 19, 20.

1. **I**N the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign. 2. Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD his God, like David his father. 3. But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel. 4. And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

We have here a general character of the reign of Ahaz, few and evil were his days; few, for he died at thirty six; evil, for we are here told,

1. That he did not that which was right like David, ver. 2.

1. e. He had none of that concern and affection for the instituted service and worship of God, which David was famous for. He had no love for the temple, made no conscience of his duty to God, nor had any regard to his law.—Herein he was unlike David, it was his honour that he was of the house and lineage of David, and it was owing to God's ancient covenant with David, that he was now upon the throne, which aggravated his wickedness, that he was a reproach to that honourable name and family, which therefore was really a reproach to him; (*Degeneranti genus opprobrium*) and that though he enjoyed the benefit of David's piety, he did not tread in the steps of it.

2. That he walked *in the way of the kings of Israel*, ver. 3. who all worshipped the calves. He was not joined in any affinity with them, as Jehoram and Ahaziah were with the house of Ahab, but *ex mero motu*, without any instigation walked in their way. The kings of Israel pleaded policy and reasons of state for their idolatry, but Ahaz had no such pretence, in him it was the most unreasonable impolitick thing that could be. They were his enemies, and had proved enemies to themselves too by their idolatry, yet he walked in their way.

3. That he *made his sons to pass through the fire* to the honour of his dunghill deities. He burnt them, so it is expressly said of him, 2 *Chron.* xxviii. 3. burnt some of them, and, perhaps, made others of them, (Hezekiah himself not excepted, though afterwards he was never the worse for it) to pass between two fires, or to be drawn through a flame, in token of their dedication to the idol.

4. That he did *according to the abomination of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out*. It was an instance of his great folly, that he would be guided by those in his religion, and follow them whom he saw fallen into the ditch before his eyes; and of his great impiety, that he would conform to those usages which God had declared to be abominable to him; and set himself to write after the copy of those whom God had cast out, thus walking directly contrary to God.

5. That he *sacrificed in the high places*, ver. 4. If his father had but had zeal enough to take them away, it might have prevented the debauching of his sons: But they that connive at sin, know not what dangerous snares they lay for those that come after them. He forsook God's house, was weary of that place where, in his father's time, he had oft been detained before the Lord, and performed his devotions on high hills, where he had a better prospect, and under green trees, where he had a more pleasant shade. It was a religion little worth, which was guided by fancy, not by faith.

5. ¶ Then Rezin king of Syria, and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to war: and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him.

6. At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drove the Jews from Elath: and the Syrians came to Elath, and dwelt there unto this day. 7. So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, I am thy servant, and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me. 8. And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria. 9. And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him: for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin.

Here is, 1. The attempt of his confederate neighbours the kings of Syria and Israel upon him. They thought to have made themselves masters of Jerusalem, and to have set a king of their own in it, *Isa.* vii. 6. in that they fell short, but the king of Syria recovered Elath, a considerable port upon the Red sea, which Amaziah had taken from the Syrians, *chap.* xiv. 22. What can they keep that have lost their religion? Let them expect thenceforward to be always on the losing hand.

2. His project to get clear of him. Having forsaken God, he had neither courage nor strength to make head against his enemies, nor could he with any boldness ask help of God, but he made his court to the king of Assyria, and got him to come in for his relief. They whose hearts condemn them, will go any whither in a day of distress, rather than to God. Was it because there was not a God in Israel, that he sent to the Assyrians for help? Was the rock of ages removed out of its place, that he stayed himself on this broken reed? The sin itself was its own punishment; for though it is true he gained his point, the king of Assyria hearkened to him, and to serve his own turn, made a descent upon Damascus, whereby he gave a powerful diversion to the king of Syria, ver. 9. and obliged him to let fall his design against Ahaz, carrying the Syrians captive to Kir, as Amos had expressly foretold, *chap.* i. 5. yet considering all, he made but an ill bargain, for to compass this,

(1.) He enslaved himself, ver. 7. *I am thy servant, and thy son*, i. e. I will be as dutiful and obedient to thee as to a master or father, if thou wilt but do me this good turn. Had he thus humbled himself to God, and implored his favour, he might have been delivered upon easier terms, might have saved his money, and needed only to have parted with his sins: but if the prodigal out-run his father's house, he soon becomes a slave to the worst of masters, *Luke* xv. 15.

(2.) He impoverished himself, for he took the silver and gold that was laid up in the treasury both of the temple and of the kingdom, and sent it to the king of Assyria, ver. 8. Both church and state must be squeezed and exhausted, to gratify this his new patron and guardian. I know not what authority he had thus to dispose of the publick stock; but it is common for those that have brought themselves into straits by one sin, to help themselves out by another; and those that have alienated themselves from God, will make no difficulty of alienating any other of his rights.

10. ¶ And king Ahaz went to Damascus, to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus: and king Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof. 11. And Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that king Ahaz had sent from Damascus: so Urijah the priest made it, against king Ahaz came from Damascus. 12. And when the king was come from Damascus, the king saw the altar: and the king approached to the altar, and offered thereon. 13. And he burnt his burnt-offering, and his meat-offering, and poured his drink-offering, and sprinkled the blood of his peace-offerings upon the altar. 14. And he brought also the brazen altar which was before the LORD, from the fore-front of the house, from between the altar and the house of the LORD, and put it on the north side of the altar. 15. And king Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, Upon the great altar burn the morning burnt-offering, and the evening meat-offering, and the king's burnt-sacrifice, and his meat-offering with the burnt-offering of all the people of the land, and their meat-offering, and their drink-offerings, and sprinkle upon it all the blood of the burnt-offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice: and the brazen altar shall be for me to enquire by. 16. Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that king Ahaz commanded.

Though Ahaz had himself sacrificed in high places, on hills, and under every green tree, ver. 4. yet God's altar had hitherto continued in its place, and in use, and the king's burnt-offering and his meat-offering, ver. 15. had been offered upon it by the priests that attended it; but here we have it taken away by wicked Ahaz, and another altar, an idolatrous one, put in the room of it; a bolder stroke than the worst of the kings had yet given to religion. We have here,

1. The model of this new altar, taken from one at Damascus, by the king himself, ver. 10. The king of Assyria having taken Damascus, thither Ahaz went to congratulate his success, to return him thanks for the kindness he had done him by this expedition, and as his servant and son to receive his commands. Had he been faithful to his God, he had not need to have sneaked thus to a foreign power. At Damascus, either in his viewing of the rarities of the place, or rather in his joining with them in their devotions, (for when he was there, he thought it no harm to do as they there did) he saw an altar that pleased his fancy extremely, not such a plain old fashioned one as that which he had been trained up in an attendance upon at Jerusalem, but curiously carved, it is likely, and adorned with image-work, many pretty odd things there were about it, which were significant he thought, surprising, and very charming, and apt to excite his devotion. Solomon had but a dull fancy, he thinks, compared with the ingenious artist that made this altar. Nothing will serve him but he must have an altar just like this: a pattern of it must be taken immediately; he cannot stay till he returns himself, but sends it before him in all haste, with orders to Urijah the priest, to get one made exactly according to this model, and have it ready against he came home. The pattern God shewed to Moses in the mount, or to David by the Spirit, was not comparable to this pattern sent from Damascus. The hearts of idolaters walked after their eyes, which are therefore said to go a whoring after their idols, but the true worshippers worship the true God by faith.

2. The making of it by Urijah the priest, ver. 11. This Urijah, it is likely, was the chief priest, who at this time presided in the temple service. To him Ahaz sent an intimation of his mind, (for we read not of any express orders he gave him) to get an altar made by this pattern. And without any dispute

or objection he set it a doing presently, being, perhaps, as fond of it as the king was, at least being very willing to humour the king, and desirous to curry favour with him. Perhaps, he might have this excuse for gratifying the king herein, that by this means he might keep him to the temple at Jerusalem, and prevent his total deserting it for the high places and the groves. Let us oblige him in this, (thinks Urijah) and then he will bring all his sacrifices to us; for by this craft we get our living. But whatever pretence he had, it was a most base wicked thing for him that was a priest, a chief priest, to make this altar in compliance with an idolatrous prince. For hereby, (1.) He prostituted his authority, and profaned the crown of his priesthood, making himself a servant to the lusts of men. There is not a greater disgrace to the ministry, than obsequiousness to such wicked commands as this was. (2.) He betrayed his trust. As priest, he was bound to maintain and defend God's institution, and to oppose and witness against all innovations; and for him to assist and serve the king, in setting up an altar to confront the altar which by divine appointment he was consecrated to minister at, was such a piece of treachery and perfidiousness, as may justly render him infamous to all posterity. Had he only connived at the doing of it, had he been frightened into it by menaces, had he endeavoured to dissuade the king from it, or but delayed the doing of it till he came home, that he might first talk with him about it, it had not been so bad; but so willingly to walk after his commandment, as if he were glad of the opportunity to oblige him, was such an affront to the God he served, as was utterly inexcusable.

3. The dedicating of it. Urijah perceiving that the king's heart was much upon it, took care to have it ready against he came down, and set it near the brazen altar, but somewhat lower and farther from the door of the temple. The king was wonderfully pleased with it, approached to it with all possible veneration, and offered thereon his burnt-offering, &c. *ver. 12, 13.* His sacrifices were not offered to the God of Israel, but to the gods of Damascus, as we find *2 Chron. xxviii. 23.* and when he borrowed the Syrians altar, no marvel he borrowed their gods. Naaman the Syrian embraced the God of Israel, when he got earth from the land of Israel to make an altar of.

4. The removal of God's altar to make room for it. Uzziah was so modest, that he put this altar at the lower end of the court, and left God's altar in its place, *between this and the house of the Lord, ver. 14.* But that would not satisfy Ahaz, he removed God's altar to an obscure corner, in the north side of the court, and put his own before the sanctuary, in the place of it. He thinks his new altar is much more stately, and much more sightly, and shames that, and therefore let that be laid aside as a vessel in which there was no pleasure. His superstitious invention at first justified with, but at length justified out God's sacred institution. Note, Those will soon come to make nothing of God, that will not be content to make him their all. Ahab durst not (perhaps, for fear of the people) quite demolish the brazen altar, and knock it to pieces; but while he ordered all the sacrifices to be offered upon his new altar, *ver. 15. The brazen altar (saith he) shall be for me to enquire by.* Having thrust it out from the use for which it was instituted, which was to sanctify the gifts offered upon it, he pretends to advance it above its institution, which it is common for superstitious people to do. The altar was never designed for an oracle, yet Ahaz will have it for that use. The Romish church seemingly magnifies Christ's sacraments, yet wretchedly corrupts them. — But some give another sense of Ahaz's purpose; as for the brazen altar I will consider what to do with it, and give order about it. The Jews say, that afterwards of the bras of it, he made that famous dial, which was called *the dial of Ahaz, chap. xx. 11.* The base compliance of the poor-spirited priest, with the presumptuous usurpations of an ill-spirited king, is again taken notice of, *ver. 16. Urijah the priest did according to all that king Ahaz commanded.* Miserable is the case of great men, when those that should reprove them for their sins, strengthen and serve them in their sins.

17. ¶ And king Ahaz cut off the borders of the bases, and removed the laver from off them, and took down the sea from off the brazen oxen that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stones. 18. And the covert for the sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king's entry without, turned he from the house of the LORD, for the king of Assyria. 19. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz, which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 20. And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David, and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.

Here is, 1. Ahaz abusing the temple; not the building itself, but some of the furniture of it. 1. He defaced the bases on which the lavers were set, *1 Kings vii. 28, 29.* and took down the molten sea, *ver. 17.* These the priests used for washing, at

them therefore he seems to have had a particular spite. It is one of the greatest prejudices that can be done to religion, to obstruct the purifying of the priests, the Lord's ministers. 2. He removed the covert from the sabbath; erected either in honour of the sabbath, or for the conveniency of the priests, when on the sabbath they officiated in greater numbers than on other days. Whatever it was, it should seem in removing it, he intended to put a contempt upon the sabbath, and so to open as wide an inlet as any other to all manner of impiety. 3. The king's entry, which led to the house of the Lord, for the convenience of the royal family, (perhaps, that ascent which Solomon had made, and which the queen of Sheba admired, *1 Kings x. 5.*) he turned another way, to shew that he did not intend to frequent the house of the Lord any more. This he did for the king of Assyria, to oblige him, who perhaps returned his visit, and found fault with his entry, as an inconvenience and disparagement to his palace. When those that have had a ready passage to the house of the Lord, to please their neighbours turn it another way, they are going down the hill apace towards their ruin.

2. Ahaz resigning his life in the midst of his days, at thirty six years of age, *ver. 19.* and leaving his kingdom to a better man, Hezekiah his son, *ver. 20.* who proved as much a friend to the temple, as he had been an enemy to it. Perhaps, this very son he had made to pass through the fire, and thereby dedicated him to Moloch; but God by his grace snatched him as a brand out of the burning.

C H A P. XVII.

This chapter gives us an account of the captivity of the ten tribes, and so finisheth the history of that kingdom, after it had continued about two hundred and sixty five years from the setting up of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. In it we have, 1. A short narrative of the destruction, ver. 1—5. 2. Remarks upon it, and the causes of it, for the justifying of God in it, and for warning to others, ver. 7—23. 3. An account of the nations which succeeded them in the possession of their land, and the mongrel religion set up among them, ver. 24—41.

1. **I**N the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria, over Israel nine years. 2. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him. 3. ¶ Against him came up Shalmanezzer king of Assyria, and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents. 4. And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and brought no present to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year: therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison. 5. ¶ Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. 6. ¶ In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah, and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

We have here the reign and ruin of Hoshea, the last of the kings of Israel, concerning whom observe,

1. That though he forced his way to the crown by treason and murder, as we read *chap. xv. 30.* yet he gained not the possession of it till seven or eight years after; for it was in the fourth year of Ahaz that he slew Pekah, but did not himself begin to reign till the twelfth year of Ahaz, *ver. 1.* Whether by the king of Assyria, or by the king of Judah, or by some of his own people, doth not appear, but it seems so long he was kept out of the throne he aimed at. Justly were his ill practices thus chastised, and the word of the prophet was thus fulfilled, *Hos. x. 3. Now they shall say, We have no king, because we feared not the Lord.*

2. That though he was bad, yet not so bad as the kings of Israel that had been before him, *ver. 2.* not so doting fond of the calves as they had been. One of them, that at Dan, the Jews say, had been before this carried away by the king of Assyria in that expedition, *chap. xv. 29.* (to which, perhaps, the prophet refers, *Hos. viii. 5. Thy calf, O Samaria, has cast thee off*) which made him put the less confidence in the other. And some say, that this Hoshea took off the embargo which the former kings had put their subjects under, forbidding them to go up to Jerusalem to worship, which he permitted those to do that had a mind to it. But what shall we think of this dispensation of providence, that the destruction of the kingdom of Israel should come in the reign of one of the best of its kings? *Thy judgments, O God, are a great deep.* God would hereby shew, that in bringing this ruin upon them, he designed to punish, (1.) Not only the sins of that generation, but of the foregoing ages, and to reckon for the iniquities of their fathers, who had been long in filling the measure, and treasuring up wrath against this

this day of wrath. (2.) Not only the sins of their kings, but the sins of the people. If Hoshea was not so bad as the former kings, yet the people were as bad as those that went before them, and it was an aggravation of their badness, and brought ruin the sooner; that their king did not set them so ill an example as the former kings had done, nor hinder them from reforming; he gave them leave to do better, but they did as bad as ever, which laid the blame of their sin and ruin wholly upon themselves.

3. That the destruction came gradually. They were for some time made tributaries, before they were made captives to the king of Assyria, *ver. 3.* and if that lesser judgment had prevailed to humble and reform them, the greater had been prevented.

4. That they brought it upon themselves by the indirect course they took to shake off the yoke of the king of Assyria, *ver. 4.* Had the king and people of Israel applied themselves to God, made their peace with him, and their prayers to him, they might have recovered their liberty, ease and honour; but they withheld their tribute, and trusted to the king of Egypt to assist them in their revolt, which if it had taken effect, had been but to change their oppressors: But Egypt became to them the staff of a broken reed. This provoked the king of Assyria to proceed against them with the more severity. Men get nothing by struggling with the net, but entangle themselves the more.

5. That it was an utter destruction that came upon them.

(1.) The king of Israel was made a prisoner; he was shut up and bound; being, it is probable, taken by surprise, before Samaria was besieged.

(2.) The land of Israel was made a prey. The army of the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and made themselves masters of it, *ver. 5.* and using them as traitors punished with the sword of justice, rather than as fair enemies.

(3.) The royal city of Israel was besieged, and at length taken. Three years it held out, after the country was conquered, and, no doubt, a great deal of misery they endured in that time which is not particularly recorded, but the very brevity of the story, and the passing of this matter over lightly, methinks, intimates that they were abandoned of God, and he did not now regard the affliction of Israel, as sometimes he had done.

(4.) The people of Israel were carried captives into Assyria, *ver. 6.* The generality of the people, those that were of any note, were forced away into the conqueror's country, to be slaves and beggars there. 1. Thus he was pleased to exercise a dominion over them, and to shew that they were entirely at his dispose. 2. By depriving them of their possessions and estates, real and personal, and exposing them to all the hardships and reproaches of a remove to a strange country, under the power of an imperious army he chastised them for their rebellion, and their endeavour to shake off his yoke. 3. Thus he effectually prevented all such like attempts for the future, and secured their own country to himself. 4. Thus he got the benefit of their service in his own country, as Pharaoh did that of their fathers; and so this unworthy people were lost as they were found, and ended as they began, in servitude, and under oppression. 5. Thus he made room for those of his own country, that had little, and little to do at home, to settle in a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey. All these several ways he served himself by this captivity of the ten tribes. We are here told in what places of his kingdom he disposed of them, in Halah and Habor, in places, we may suppose, far distant from each other, lest they should keep up a correspondence, incorporate again, and become formidable. There, we have reason to think, after some time, they were so mingled with the nations, that they were lost, and the name of Israel was no more in remembrance. They that forgot God, were themselves forgotten; and they that studied to be like the nations, were buried among them; and they that would not serve God in their own land, were made to serve their enemies in a strange land. It is likely, they were the men of honour and estates that were carried captive, and that many of the meaner sort of people were left behind, many of every tribe, who either went over to Judah, or became subject to the Assyrian colonies, and their posterity were Galileans, or Samaritans. But thus ended Israel as a nation; now they became *Lo-ammi*, not a people; and *Lo-rubamah*, unpitied. Now Canaan spued them out. When we read their entry under Hoshea the son of Nun, who would have thought that such as this should have been their exit under Hoshea the son of Elah? Thus Rome's glory in Augustus, sunk many ages after in Augustulus. Providence so ordered the eclipsing of the honour of the ten tribes, that the honour of Judah the royal tribe, and Levi the holy tribe, which yet remained, might shine the brighter. Yet we find a number sealed of each of the twelve tribes, *Rev. vii.* except Dan. James writes to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, *Jam. i. 1.* and Paul speaks of the twelve tribes which *instantly served God day and night*, *Acts xxvi. 7.* So that though we never read of the return of those that were carried captive, nor have any reason to credit the conjecture of some, that they yet remain a distinct body in some remote corner of the world; yet a remnant of them did escape, to keep up the name of Israel, till it came to be worn by the gospel

church, the spiritual Israel, in which it will ever remain, *Gal. vi. 16.*

7. For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, 8. And walked in the statutes of the heathen, (whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel) and of the kings of Israel which they had made. 9. And the children of Israel did secretly *those* things that were not right, against the LORD their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen, to the fenced city. 10. And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree: 11. And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as *did* the heathen whom the LORD carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger. 12. For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing. 13. Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments, and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. 14. Notwithstanding, they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God. 15. And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them, and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them. 16. And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, *even* two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. 17. And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. 18. Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only. 19. Also Judah kept not the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel, which they made. 20. And the LORD rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight. 21. For he rent Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king, and Jeroboam drave Israel from following the LORD, and made them sin a great sin. 22. For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did, they departed not from them: 23. Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria, unto this day.

Though the destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes was but briefly related, it is in these verses largely commented upon by our historian, and the reasons of it assigned, not taken from the second causes, the weakness of Israel, and their impolitical management, the strength and growing greatness of the Assyrian monarch, these things are over-looked; but only from the first cause.

(1.) It was *the Lord that removed Israel out of his sight*; whoever were the instruments, he was the author of this calamity: It was *destruction from the Almighty*; the Assyrian was but: the *rod of his anger*, *Isa. x. 5.* It was *the Lord that rejected the seed of Israel*, else their enemies could not have seized upon them, *ver. 20.* *Who gave Jacob to the spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord?* *Isa. xlii. 24.* We lose the benefit of national judgments, if we do not eye the hand of God in them, and the fulfilling of the scripture; for that also is taken notice of here, *ver. 3.* *The Lord removed Israel out of his favour, and out of their own land, as he had said by all his servants the prophets*; rather shall heaven and earth pass, than one tittle of God's word fall to the ground. When God's word and his works are compared, it will be found not only that they agree, but that they illustrate each other. But why would God ruin a people that were raised and incorporated, as Israel was, by

by miracles and oracles? Why would he undo that which himself had done at so vast an expence? Was it purely an act of sovereignty? No, it was an act of necessary justice. For,

(2.) They provoked him to do this by their wickedness. Was it God's doing? Nay, it was their own, their way and their doings procured all this to themselves, and it was their own wickedness that did correct them; this the sacred historian shews here at large, that it might appear God did them no wrong, and that others might hear and fear; come and see what it was that did all this mischief, that broke their power and laid their honour in the dust, it was sin, that and nothing else separated between them and God, that is here very movingly laid open as the cause of all the desolations of Israel. He here shews,

1. What God had done for Israel to engage them to serve him.

(1.) He gave them their liberty, *ver. 7.* he brought them from under the hand of Pharaoh, who oppressed them, asserted their freedom, *Israel is my son*, and effected their freedom with a high hand, thus they were bound in duty and gratitude to be his servants, for he had loosed their bonds; nor would he that rescued them out of the hand of the king of Egypt have contradicted himself so far as to deliver them into the hand of the king of Assyria as he did, if they had not by their iniquity betrayed their liberty and sold themselves. — (2.) He gave them their law, and was himself their king, they were immediately under a divine regimen, they could not plead ignorance of good and evil, sin and duty, for God had particularly charged them against those very things which here he chargeth them with, *ver. 15.* *That they should not do like the heathen*; nor could they be in any doubt concerning their obligation to observe this charge, for they were the commandments and statutes of the Lord their God, *ver. 13.* so that no room was left to dispute whether they should keep them or no; he had not dealt so with other nations, *Psal. cxlviii. 19, 20.* — (3.) He gave them their land, for he cast out the heathen from before them, (*ver. 8.*) to make room for them, and the casting out of them for their idolatries was as fair a warning as could be given to Israel not to do like them.

2. What they had done against God, notwithstanding these engagements he had laid upon them.

(1.) In general, they sinned against the Lord their God, *ver. 7.* they did those things that were not right, *ver. 9.* but secretly, so wedded were they to their evil practices, that when they could not do them publicly, could not for shame, or could not for fear, they would do them secretly: an instance of their atheism, that they thought what was done in secret was from under the eye of God himself, and would not be required. — Again, they wrought wicked things in such a direct contradiction to the divine law, that it seemed as if it were done on purpose to provoke the Lord to anger, *ver. 11.* in contempt of his authority and defiance of his justice. — They rejected God's statutes, and his covenant, *ver. 15.* would not be bound up either by his command or the consent they themselves had given to the covenant, but threw off the obligations of both, and therefore God justly rejected them, *ver. 20.* See *Hof. iv. 6.* — They left all the commandments of the Lord their God, *ver. 16.* left the way, left the work which those commandments prescribed them and directed them in; nay, lastly, they sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, i. e. they wholly addicted themselves to sin, as slaves to the service of those to whom they are sold, and by their obstinate persisting in sin so hardened their own hearts, that at length it was become morally impossible for them to recover themselves, as one that has sold himself has put his liberty past recall.

(2.) In particular; though they were guilty (no doubt) of many immoralities, and violated all the commands of the second table, yet nothing is here instanced in but their idolatry, that was the sin that did most easily beset them, that was of all other most provoking to God, it was the spiritual adultery that broke the marriage covenant, and was the inlet of all other wickedness; this is again and again mentioned here as the sin that ruined them.

(1.) They feared other gods, *ver. 7.* i. e. worshipped them, and paid their homage to them, as if they feared their discipline.

(2.) They walked in the statutes of the heathen, which were contrary to God's statutes, *ver. 8.* did as did the heathen, *ver. 11.* went after the heathen that were round about them, *ver. 15.* so prostituting the honour of their peculiarity, and defeating God's design concerning them, which was, that they should be distinguished from the heathen; must they that were taught of God go to school to the heathen? They that were appropriated to God, take their measures from the nations that were abandoned by him? (3.) They walked in the statutes of the idolatrous kings of Israel, *ver. 8.* in all the sins of Jeroboam, *ver. 22.* When their kings assumed a power to alter, and add to the divine institutions, they submitted to them, and thought the command of their kings would bear them out in disobedience to the command of their God. (4.) They built them high places in all their cities, *ver. 9.* if it were but the tower of the watchmen, a country town, that had no walls, but only a tower to shelter the watch in time of danger, or but a lodge for shepherds, it must be honoured with a high place, and that with an altar; if it were a fenced city, it must be further fortified with a high place; having forsaken God's holy place they knew no end of high places,

in which every man followed his own fancy, and directed his devotion to what god he pleased; sacred things were hereby profaned and laid common, when their altars were as heaps in the furrows of the field, *Hof. xii. 11.* (5.) They set them up images and groves, Asherim, even wooden images, so some think that should be rendered which we translate groves; or Ashtaroth; so others, *ver. 10.* directly contrary to the second commandment; they served idols, *ver. 12.* the works of their own hands, and creatures of their own fancy, though God had warned them particularly not to do this thing. (6.) They burnt incense in all the high places to the honour of strange gods, for it was to the dishonour of the true God, *ver. 11.* — (7.) They followed vanity; idols are called so, because they could do neither good nor evil, were the most insignificant things that could be, they that worshipped them were like unto them, and so they became vain and good for nothing, *ver. 16.* vain in their devotions, which were brutish and ridiculous, and so became vain in their whole conversation. (8.) Besides the molten images, even the two calves, they worshipped all the host of heaven, the sun, moon and stars, for it is not meant of the heavenly host of angels, they could not rise so far above sensible things as to think of them; and withal they served Baal, the deified hero's of the Gentiles, *ver. 16.* (9.) They caused their children to pass through the fire, in token of their dedicating of them to their idols; and lastly, they used divinations and enchantments, that they might receive directions from the gods to whom they paid their devotions.

3. What means God used with them to bring them off from their idolatries, and to how little purpose; he testified against them, shewed them their sins, and warned them of the fatal consequences of them by all the prophets and all the seers, (for so the prophets had been formerly called) and had pressed them to turn from their evil ways, *ver. 13.* We have read of prophets more or less in every reign; though they had forsaken God's family of priests, he did not leave them without a succession of prophets that made it their business to teach them the good knowledge of the Lord, but all in vain, *ver. 14.* they would not hear, but hardened their necks, persisted in their idolatries, and, like their fathers, that would not bow their necks to God's yoke because they did not believe in him, did not receive his truths, nor would venture upon his promises: it seems to refer to their fathers in the wilderness, the same sin that kept them out of Canaan turned these out, and that was unbelief.

4. How God punished them for their sins; he was very angry with them, *ver. 18.* for in the matter of his worship he is a jealous God, and resents nothing more heinously than giving that honour to any creature which is due to him only; he afflicted them, (*ver. 20.*) and delivered them into the hand of spoilers in the days of the Judges and of Saul, and afterwards in the days of most of their kings, to see if they would be awakened by the judgments of God to consider and amend their ways; but when all these corrections did not prevail to drive out the folly, God first rent Israel from the house of David, under which they might have been happy; as Judah was hereby weakened, so Israel was hereby corrupted, for they made one king that drove them from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin, *ver. 21.* this was a national judgment, and the punishment of their former idolatries; and at length he removed them quite out of his sight, *ver. 18, 23.* without giving them any hopes of a return out of their captivity.

Lastly, Here is a complaint against Judah in the midst of all, *ver. 19.* Also Judah kept not the commandments of God, though they were not as yet quite so bad as Israel, yet they walked in the statutes of Israel, and this aggravated the sin of Israel, that they communicated the infection of it to Judah, see *Ezek. xxiii. 11.* Those that bring sin into a country or family, bring a plague into it, and will be to answer for all the mischief that follows.

24. ¶ And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria, instead of the children of Israel; and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof. 25. And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there; that they feared not the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew some of them. 26. Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land. 27. Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence, and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land. 28. Then one of the priests, whom they had carried away from Samaria, came and dwelt

in Beth-el, and taught them how they should fear the LORD. 29. Howbeit, every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt. 30. And the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, 31. And the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sephavites burnt their children in fire to Adramelech and Anammelech the gods of Sepharvaim. 32. So they feared the LORD, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. 33. They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations, whom they carried away from thence. 34. Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the LORD, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel; 35. With whom the LORD had made a covenant, and charged them, saying, Ye shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them: 36. But the LORD, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, with great power, and a stretched out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship, and to him shall ye do sacrifice. 37. And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the law, and the commandment which he wrote for you, ye shall observe to do for evermore, and ye shall not fear other gods. 38. And the covenant that I have made with you, ye shall not forget, neither shall ye fear other gods. 39. But the LORD your God ye shall fear, and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies. 40. Howbeit, they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner. 41. So these nations feared the LORD, and served their graven images, both their children, and their childrens children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.

Never was land lost (we say) for want of an heir, when the children of Israel were dispossessed and turned out of Canaan the king of Assyria soon transplanted thither the supernumeraries of his own country, such as it could well spare, who should be servants to him, and masters to the Israelites that remained; and here we have an account of these new inhabitants, whose story is related here that we may take our leave of Samaria, as also of the Israelites that were carried captive into Assyria.

1. Concerning the Assyrians that were brought into the land of Israel we are here told,

(1.) That they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof, ver. 24. It is common for lands to change their owners, but sad that the holy land should become a heathen land again; see what work sin makes.

(2.) That at their first coming God sent lions among them; it is probable, they were not enow to people the country, which occasioned the beast of the field to multiply against them, Exod. xxiii. 29. yet besides the natural cause there was manifest a hand of God in it, who is Lord of hosts, of all the creatures, and can serve his own purposes by which he pleaseth, little or big, lice or lions; God ordered them this rough welcome to check their pride and insolence, and to let them know, that though they had conquered Israel, the God of Israel had power enough to deal with them, that he could have prevented their settling here by ordering lions into the service of Israel, and that he permitted it not for their righteousness, but the wickedness of his own people, and that they were now under his visitation; they had lived without God in their own land and were not plagued with lions, but if they do so in this land it is at their peril.

(3.) That they sent a remonstrance of this grievance to the king their master, setting forth, it is likely, the loss their infant colony had sustained by the lions, and the continual fear they were in of them, that they looked upon it to be a judgment upon them for not worshipping the God of the land, which they could not because they knew not how, ver. 26. The God of Israel was the God of the whole world, but they ignorantly call him the God of the land, apprehending themselves therefore within his reach, and concerned to be upon good terms with him, herein they shamed the Israelites, who were not so ready to hear the voice of God's judgments as they were, and who had not served the God of that land, though he was the God of their fathers, and their great benefactor, and though they were well instructed in the manner of his worship; Assyrians beg to be taught that which Israelites hated to be taught.

4. That the king of Assyria took care to have them taught the manner of the God of the land, ver. 27, 28. not out of any

affection to that God, but to save his subjects from the lions. — On this errand he sent back one of the priests whom he had carried away captive, a prophet would have done them more good, for this was but one of the priests of the calves, and therefore chose to dwell at Bethel for old acquaintance sake, and though he might teach them to do better than they did, he was not likely to teach them to do well, unless he had taught his own people better, however he came and dwelt among them, to teach them how they should fear the Lord; whether he taught them out of the book of the law, or only by word of mouth, is uncertain.

5. That being thus taught they made a mungrel religion of it, worshipped the God of Israel for fear, and their own idols for love, ver. 33. They feared the Lord, but they served their own gods; they all agreed to worship the God of the land, according to the manner, to observe the Jewish festivals and rites of sacrificing, but every nation made gods of their own beside, not only for their private use in their own families, but to be put in the houses of their high places, ver. 29. The idols of each country are here named, ver. 30, 31. The learned are at a loss for the signification of several of these names, and cannot agree by what representations these gods were worshipped. If we may credit the traditions of the Jewish doctors, they tell us, that Succoth-Benoth was worshipped in a hen and chickens, Nergal in a cock, Ashima in a smooth goat, Nibhaz in a dog, Tartak in an ass, Adramelech in a peacock, Anammelech in a pheasant. — Our own tell us more probably, That Succoth-Benoth signifying the tents of the daughters, this was Venus; Nergal being worshipped by the Cuthites or Persians, was the fire; Adramelech and Anammelech were only distinctions of Moloch; see how vain idolaters were in their imaginations, and wonder at their sottishness. — Our very ignorance concerning these idols teacheth us the accomplishment of that word which God has spoken, That these false gods should all perish, Jer. x. 11. they are all buried in oblivion, while the name of the true God shall continue for ever.

This madly superstition is here said to continue unto this day, ver. 41. till the time when this book was written, and long after, above three hundred years in all, till the time of Alexander the great, when Manasse, brother to Jaddus the high priest of the Jews, having married the daughter of Sanballat, governor of the Samaritans, went over to them, got leave of Alexander to build a temple in mount Gerizim, drew over many of the Jews to him, and prevailed with the Samaritans to cast away all their idols, and to worship the God of Israel only, yet their worship was mixed with so much superstition that our Saviour tells them they knew not what they worshipped, John iv. 22.

2. Concerning the Israelites that were carried into the land of Assyria; the historian has occasion to speak of them, ver. 33. shewing that their successors in the land did as they had done, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away, they worshipped both the God of Israel and those other gods; but what did the captives do in the land of their affliction? Were they reformed and brought to repentance by their troubles? No, they do after the former manner, ver. 34. When the two tribes were afterwards carried into Babylon, they were cured by it of their idolatry, and therefore after seventy years they were brought back with joy, but the ten tribes were hardened in the furnace, and therefore were justly lost in it, and left to perish.

This obstinacy of theirs is here aggravated by the consideration, (1.) Of the honour God had put upon them, as the seed of Jacob, whom he named Israel, and from him they were so named, but were a reproach to that worthy name by which they were called. (2.) Of the covenant he made with them, and the charge he gave them upon that covenant, which is here very fully recited, that they should fear and serve the Lord Jehovah only, who had brought them up out of Egypt, ver. 36. That having received his statutes and ordinances in writing, they should observe to do them for evermore, ver. 37. and never forget that covenant which God had made with them, the promises and conditions of that covenant, especially that great article of it which is here thrice repeated, because it had been so oft inculcated and so much insisted on, that they should not fear other gods, he had told them that if they kept close to him he would deliver them out of the hand of all their enemies, ver. 39. yet when they were in the hand of their enemies, and stood in need of deliverance, they were so stupid, and had so little sense of their own interest, that they did after the former manner, ver. 40. they served both true God and false gods, as if they knew no difference. Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone, so they did, and so did the nations that succeeded them; well might the apostle ask, What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise, for both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin, Rom. iii. 9.

C H A P. XVIII.

When the prophet had condemned Ephraim for lies and deceit, he comforted himself with this, that Judah yet ruled with God, and was faithful with the most holy, Hos. xi. 12. It was a very melancholy view which the last chapter gave us of the desolations

solutions of Israel, but this chapter shews us the affairs of Judah in a good posture at the same time, that it may appear God has not quite cast off the seed of Abraham, Rom. xi. 1.—Hezekiah is here upon the throne, (1.) Reforming his kingdom, ver. 1—6. (2.) Prospering in all his undertakings, ver. 7, 8. and this at the same time when the ten tribes were led captive, ver. 9—12. (3.) Yet invaded by Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, ver. 13. His country put under contribution, ver. 14—16. Jerusalem besieged, ver. 17. God blasphemed, himself reviled, and his people solicited to revolt in a virulent speech made by Rabshakeh, ver. 18—37. but how well it ended, and how much to the honour and comfort of our great reformer, we shall find in the next chapter.

1. **N**OW it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. 2. Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem: his mothers name also was Abi, the daughter of Zachariah. 3. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did. 4. ¶ He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. 5. He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. 6. For he clave to the LORD, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses. 7. And the LORD was with him, and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not. 8. He smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.

We have here a general account of the reign of Hezekiah, it appears, by comparing his age with his father's, that he was born when his father was about eleven or twelve years old, divine providence so ordering that he might be of full age, and fit for business then, when the measure of his father's iniquity should be full. Here is,

1. His great piety, which was the more wonderful, because his father was very wicked and vile, one of the worst of the kings, yet he one of the best, which may intimate to us, (1.) That what good there is in any, it is not of nature, but of grace, free grace, sovereign grace, which, contrary to nature, grafts into the good olive, that which was wild by nature, Rom. xi. 24. (2.) That that grace gets over the greatest difficulties and disadvantages; Ahaz, it is likely, gave his son a bad education as well as a bad example; Urijah, his priest, perhaps, had the tuition of him; his attendants and companions, we may suppose, such as were addicted to idolatry, and yet Hezekiah became eminently good; when God's grace will work, what can hinder it?

(1.) He was a genuine son of David, though he had a great many degenerate ones, ver. 3. — He did that which was right, according to all that David his father did, with whom the covenant was made, and therefore was entitled to the benefit of it; we have read of some of them who did that which was right, but not like David, chap. xiv. 3. they did not love God's ordinances, nor cleave to them so as he did, but Hezekiah was a second David, had such a love for God's word and God's house as he had; let us not be frightened with an apprehension of the continual decay of virtue, as if, when times and men are bad, they must needs of course grow worse and worse, that doth not follow, for after many bad kings, God raised up one that was like David himself.

(2.) He was a zealous reformer of his kingdom, and as we find, 2 Chron. xxix. 3. he began betimes to be so, fell to work as soon as ever he came to the crown, and lost no time; he found his kingdom very corrupt, the people in all things too superstitious, they had always been so, but in the last reign worse than ever, by the influence of his wicked father, a deluge of idolatry had overspread the land, his spirit was stirred against it, we may suppose, as Paul's at Athens, while his father lived, and therefore as soon as ever he had power in his hands, he set himself to abolish it, ver. 4. though, considering how the people were wedded to it, he might think it could not be done without opposition.

1. The images and the groves were downright idolatrous, and of heathenish original, those he broke and destroyed; though his own father had set them up, and shewed an affection for them, that should not protect them; we must never dishonour God in honour to our earthly parents.

2. The high places, though they had been sometimes used by prophets upon special occasions, and had been hitherto connived at by the good kings, yet because they were an affront to the temple, and a breach of the law, which required them to worship there only, and being from under the inspection of the priests, gave opportunity for the introducing of idolatrous usages; Hezekiah, who made God's word his rule, not the example of his predecessors, removed them, made a law for the removal of them, the demolishing of the chapels, tabernacles, and altars there erected, and the suppressing of the use of them, which law was put in execution with vigour; and, it is probable, the terrible judgment which the kingdom of Israel was now under for their idolatry, made Hezekiah the more zealous, and the people the more willing to comply with him; it is well, when our neighbours harms are our warnings.

3. The brazen serpent was originally of divine institution, and yet, because it had been abused to idolatry, he broke it to pieces, — The children of Israel had brought that with them to Canaan, where they set it up we are not told, but it seems it had been carefully preserved, as a memorial of God's goodness to their fathers in the wilderness, and a traditional evidence of the truth of that story, Numb. xxi. 9. for the encouragement of the sick, to apply themselves to God for a cure, and of penitent sinners to apply themselves to him for mercy. But in process of time, when they began to worship the creature more than the Creator, they that would not worship images borrowed from the heathen, as some of their neighbours did, were drawn in by the tempter to burn incense to the brazen serpent, because that was made by order from God himself, and had been an instrument of good to them. But Hezekiah, in his pious zeal for God's honour, not only forbade the people to worship it, but that it might never be so abused any more, he shewed the people that it was Nehushtan, nothing else but a piece of brass, and that therefore it was an idle wicked thing to burn incense to it, and then broke it to pieces, that is, as bishop Patrick expounds it, ground it to powder, which he scattered in the air, that no fragment of it might remain. If any think the just honour of the brazen serpent was hereby diminished, they will find it abundantly made up again, John iii. 14. where our Saviour makes it a type of himself; good things, when idolized, are better parted with than kept.

(3.) Herein he was a nonsuch, ver. 5. none of all the kings of Judah were like him, either before or after him; two things he was eminent for in his reformation, 1. Courage and confidence in God; in abolishing idolatry, there was danger of disobliging his subjects, and provoking them to rebel, but he trusted in the Lord God of Israel, to bear him out in what he did, and save him harmless; a firm belief of God's all-sufficiency to protect and reward us, will conduce much to make us sincere, bold and vigorous in the way of our duty, like Hezekiah; when he came to the crown, he found his kingdom compassed with enemies, but he did not seek for succour to foreign aids, as his father did, but trusted the God of Israel to be the keeper of Israel. 2. Constancy and perseverance in his duty, for this there was none like him, that he clave to the Lord with a fixed resolution, and never departed from following him, ver. 6. some of his predecessors that begun well fell off, but he, like Caleb, followed the Lord fully; he not only abolished all idolatrous usage, but kept God's commandments, and in every thing made conscience of his duty.

2. His great prosperity, ver. 7, 8. he was with God, and then God was with him, and having the special presence of God with him, he prospered whithersoever he went, had wonderful success in all his enterprizes, in his wars, his buildings, and especially his reformation, that good work was carried on with less difficulty than he could have expected. They that do God's work with an eye to his glory, and with confidence in his strength, may expect to prosper in it; great is the truth, and will prevail. Finding himself successful, 1. He threw off the yoke of the king of Assyria, which his father had basely submitted to, this is called rebelling against him, because so the king of Assyria called it, but it was really an asserting of the just rights of his crown, which it was not in the power of Ahaz to alienate. — If it was imprudently done to make this bold struggle so soon, yet I see not that it was, as some think, unjustly done; when he had thrown out the idolatry of the nations, he might well throw off the yoke of their oppression: The surest way to liberty is to serve God. 2. He made a vigorous attack upon the Philistines, and smote them even unto Gaza, both the country villages and the fortified towns, and the tower of the watchmen, and the fenced cities, reducing those places which they had made themselves masters of in his father's time, 2 Chron. xxviii. 18. when he had purged out the corruptions his father had brought in, he might expect to recover the possessions his father had lost; of his victories over the Philistines Isaiah prophesied, chap. xiv. 28, &c.

9. ¶ And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Hezekiah (which was the seventh year of Hoshea, son of Elah king of Israel) that Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria, and besieged it. 10. And at the

the end of three years they took it, *even* in the sixth year of Hezekiah (that is, the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel) Samaria was taken. 11. And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria, and put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes: 12. Because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed his covenant, *and* all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, *and* would not hear *them*, nor do *them*. 13. ¶ Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them. 14. And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended, return from me: that which thou puttest on me, I will bear. And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah, three hundred talents of silver, and thirty talents of gold. 15. And Hezekiah gave *him* all the silver *that was* found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the kings house. 16. At that time did Hezekiah cut off *the gold from* the doors of the temple of the LORD, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

The kingdom of Assyria was now grown considerable, though we never read of it till the last reign, such changes there are in the affairs of nations and families, those that have been despicable become formidable, and those, on the contrary, are brought low, that have made a mighty noise and figure. We have here an account,

(1.) Of the success of Shalmaneser king of Assyria against Israel, his besieging Samaria, *ver.* 9. taking it, *ver.* 10. and carrying the people into captivity, *ver.* 11. with the reason why God brought this judgment upon them, *ver.* 12. *Because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God*; this was related more largely in the chapter before, but it is here repeated, 1. As that which stirred up Hezekiah and his people, to purge out idolatry with so much zeal, because they saw the ruin which it brought upon Israel; when their neighbour's house was on fire, and their own in danger, it was time to cast away the accursed thing. 2. As that which Hezekiah much lamented, but had not strength to prevent; though the ten tribes had revolted from, and often been vexatious to the house of David, no longer ago than in his father's reign, yet being of the seed of Israel, he could not be glad at their calamities. 3. As that which laid Hezekiah and his kingdom open to the king of Assyria, and made it much more easy for him to invade him; it is said of the ten tribes here, that they would neither hear God's commandments nor do them, *ver.* 12. Many will be content to give God the hearing, that will give him no more, *Ezek.* xxxiii. 31. but these here being resolved not to do their duty, did not care to hear of it.

(2.) Of the attempt of Sennacherib the succeeding king of Assyria against Judah, in which he was encouraged by his predecessor's success against Israel, whose honours he would vie with, and whose victories he would push forward; the descent he made upon Judah was a great calamity to that kingdom, by which God would try the faith of Hezekiah, and chastise the people, who are called an hypocritical nation, *Isa.* x. 6. because they did not heartily comply with Hezekiah's reformation, nor willingly part with their idols, but kept them up in their hearts, and, perhaps, in their houses, though their high places were removed; even times of reformation may prove troublous times, made so by those that oppose it, and then the blame is laid upon the reformers; this calamity will appear great upon Hezekiah, if we consider,

1. How much he lost of his country, *ver.* 13. The king of Assyria took all or most of the fenced cities of Judah, the frontier towns, and the garrisons, and then all the rest fell into his hands of course; the confusion which the country was put into by this invasion, is described by the prophet, *Isa.* x. 28—32.

2. How dear he paid for his peace; he saw Jerusalem itself in danger of falling into the enemies hand, as Samaria had done, and was willing to purchase its safety at the expence, (1.) Of a mean submission, *I have offered in denying the usual tribute*, and am ready to make satisfaction as shall be demanded, *ver.* 14. Where was Hezekiah's courage? where his confidence in God? why did he not advise with Isaiah before he sent this sneaking message? (2.) Of a vast sum of money, three hundred talents of silver and thirty of gold; not to be paid annually, but as a present ransom, above two hundred thousand pounds; to raise this sum he was forced not only to empty the publick treasures, *ver.* 15. but to take the gold plates off from the doors of the temple, and from the pillars, *ver.* 16. Though *the temple sanctified the gold* which he had dedicated, yet the necessity being urgent, he thought he might make as bold with that as his father David, whom he took for his pattern, did with the shew-bread, and that it was neither impious nor imprudent

to give a part for the preservation of the whole; his father Ahaz had plundered the temple in contempt of it, *2 Chron.* xxviii. 24. he had repaid with interest what his father took, and now with all due reverence, he only begs leave to borrow it again in an exigence, and for a greater good, with a resolution to restore it in full, as soon as he should be in a capacity to do it.

17. ¶ And the king of Assyria sent Tartan, and Rabsharis, and Rab-shakeh from Lachish, to king Hezekiah, with a great host against Jerusalem: and they went up and came to Jerusalem: and when they were come up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is in the high-way of the fullers field. 18. And when they had called to the king, there came out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder. 19. And Rab-shakeh said unto them, Speak ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? 20. Thou sayest (but they are but vain words) *I have* counsel and strength for the war: now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me? 21. Now, behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, *even* upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt unto all that trust on him. 22. But if ye say unto me, we trust in the LORD our God: is not that he whose high places, and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem? 23. Now therefore, I pray thee, give pledges to my lord the king of Assyria, and I will deliver thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them. 24. How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my masters servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? 25. Am I now come up without the LORD against this place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it. 26. Then said Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah, unto Rab-shakeh, Speak, I pray thee, to thy servants in the Syrian language (for we understand it) and talk not with us in the Jews language, in the ears of the people that are on the wall. 27. But Rab-shakeh said unto them, Hath my master sent me to thy master, and to thee, to speak these words? *hath he not sent me to the men which sit on the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you?* 28. Then Rab-shakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews language, and spake, saying, Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria. 29. Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you, for he shall not be able to deliver you out of his hand: 30. Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. 31. Harken not unto Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me, and then eat ye every man of his own vine, and every one of his fig-tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his cistern: 32. Until I come to take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil-olive, and of honey, that ye may live and not die: and hearken not unto Hezekiah when he persuadeth you, saying, The LORD will deliver us. 33. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? 34. Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? have they delivered Samaria out of mine hand? 35. Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand? 36. But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the kings commandment was, saying, Answer him not. 37. Then came Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, to Hezekiah with their clothes rent, and told him the words of Rab-shakeh.

Here is, 1. Jerusalem besieged by Sennacherib's army, *ver. 17.* he sent three of his great generals with a great host against Jerusalem. Is this the great king, the king of Assyria? No, never call him so, he is a base, false, perfidious man, and worthy to be made infamous to all ages; let him never be named with honour, that could do such a dishonourable thing as this, to take Hezekiah's money, which he gave him upon condition he should withdraw his army, and then instead of quitting his country, according to the agreement, to advance against his capital city, and not send him his money again neither; those are wicked men indeed, and let them be never so great, we will call them so, whose principles it is not to make themselves slaves to their word any further than is for their interest; now Hezekiah had too much reason to repent his treaty with Sennacherib, which had made him much the poorer, and never the safer.

2. Hezekiah, and his princes and people, railed upon by Rabshakeh, the chief speaker of the three generals, and that had the most satirical genius; he was instructed, no doubt, by Sennacherib what to say, who intended hereby to pick a new quarrel with Hezekiah; he had promised, upon the receipt of Hezekiah's money, to withdraw his army, and therefore cannot for shame make a forcible attack upon Jerusalem immediately, but he sends Rabshakeh to persuade Hezekiah to surrender it, and if he refuse, that shall serve him for a pretence, (and a very poor one) to besiege it, and if it hold out, to take it by storm. Rabshakeh has the impudence to desire audience of the king himself at the conduit of the upper pool, without the walls, but Hezekiah has the prudence to decline a personal treaty, and sends three commissioners, (the prime ministers of state) to hear what he had to say, but with a charge to them, not to answer that fool *according to his folly*, *ver. 36.* for they could not convince him, but would certainly provoke him, and Hezekiah had learned of his father David to believe that, then God would hear when he *as a deaf man heard not*, *Psal. xxxviii. 14, 15.* — One interruption they gave him in his discourse, which was only to desire him that he would speak to them now in the Syrian language, and they would consider of what he said, and report it to the king, and if they did not give him a satisfactory answer, then he might appeal to the people, by speaking *in the Jews language*, *ver. 20.* This was a reasonable request, and agreeable to the custom of treaties, which is, that the plenipotentiaries should settle matters between themselves, before any thing be made publick; but Hilkiyah did not consider what an unreasonable man he had to deal with, else he would not have made him this request, for it did but exasperate Rabshakeh, and make him the more rude and boisterous, *ver. 27.* Against all the rules of decency and honour, instead of treating with the commissioners, he menaceth the soldiery, persuades them to desert or mutiny, threatens if they held out to reduce them to the last extremities of famine, and then goes on with his discourse, the scope of which is to persuade Hezekiah and his princes and people to surrender the city. Observe how, in order to this,

(1.) He magnifies his master the king of Assyria, once and again he calls him, *That great king, the king of Assyria*, *ver. 19, 28.* What an idol did he make of that prince whose creature he was! God is the great king, but Sennacherib was in his eye a little god, and he would possess them with the same veneration for him that he had, and thereby frighten them into a submission to him; but to those who, by faith, see the King of kings in his power and glory, even the king of Assyria looks mean and little; what are the greatest of men, when either they come to compare with God, or God comes to contend with them? *Psal. lxxxii. 6, 7.*

(2.) He endeavours to make them believe, that it would be much for their advantage to surrender; if they held out, they must expect no other but to eat their own dung, by reason of the want of provisions, which would be entirely cut off from them by the besiegers, but if they would capitulate, seek his favour with a present, and cast themselves upon his mercy, he would give them very good treatment, *ver. 31.* I wonder with what face Rabshakeh could speak of making an agreement with a present, when his master had so lately broke the agreement Hezekiah made with him, with that great present, *ver. 14.* Can those expect to be trusted that have been so grossly perfidious? but *ad populum phalaras.* He thinks to sooth up all with a promise that if they would surrender upon discretion, though they must expect to be prisoners and captives, yet it would really be happy for them to be so: One would wonder he should ever think to prevail by such gross suggestions as these, but that the devil doth thus impose upon sinners every day by his temptations. — He will needs persuade them, 1. That their imprisonment would be to their advantage, for they should *eat every man of his own vine*, *ver. 31.* Though the property of their estates would be vested in the conquerors, yet they should have the free use of them; but he doth not explain it now to them as he would afterwards, that it must be understood just as much, and just as long as the conqueror pleaseth. — 2. That their captivity would be much more to their advantage, *I will take you away to a land like your own land*, and what the better would they be for that, when they must have nothing in it to call their own?

(3.) That which he aims at, especially, is to convince them, that it was to no purpose for them to stand it out; *What confidence is there wherein thou trustest?* So he hectors over Hezekiah, *ver. 19.* and for the people, *ver. 29.* *Let not Hezekiah deceive you into your own ruin, for he shall not be able to deliver you*, you must either bend or break; it were well if sinners would submit to the force of this argument, in making their peace with God, it is therefore our wisdom to yield to him, because it is in vain to contend with him; what confidence is that which those trust in that stand it out against him? *are we stronger than he?* or what shall we get by setting briars and thorns before a consuming fire? But Hezekiah was not so helpless and defenceless as Rabshakeh would here represent him.

Three things he supposeth Hezekiah might trust to, and he endeavours to make out the insufficiency of each.

1. His own military preparations; *Thou sayest I have counsel and strength for the war*, and we find that so he had, *2 Chron. xxxii. 3.* But this Rabshakeh turns off with a slight, *they are but vain words*, thou art an unequal match for us, *ver. 20.* — With the greatest haughtiness and disdain imaginable, he challengeth him to produce two thousand men of all his people that knew how to fit a horse, and will venture to give him two thousand horses if he can; he falsely insinuates that he had no men, or none fit to be soldiers, *ver. 23.* thus he thinks to run him down with confidence and banter, and will lay him any wager that one captain of the least of his master's servants is able to baffle him and all his forces.

2. His alliance with Egypt; he supposeth he trusted to Egypt for chariots and horsemen, *ver. 24.* because the king of Israel had done so, and of this confidence he truly saith it is *a broken reed*, *ver. 21.* it will not only fail a man when he leans on it, and expects it to bear his weight, but *it will run into his hand and pierce it*, and rent his shoulder, as the prophet further illustrates this similitude with application to Egypt, *Ezek. xxix. 6, 7.* so is the king of Egypt, saith he, and truly so had the king of Assyria been to Ahaz, who trusted in him, but he *distressed him, and strengthened him not*, *2 Chron. xxviii. 20.* They that trust to any arm of flesh, will find it no better than a broken reed, but God is the rock of ages.

3. His interest in God, and relation to him; this was indeed the confidence in which Hezekiah trusted, *ver. 22.* he supported himself by depending on the power and promise of God, with this he encouraged himself and his people, *ver. 30.* *The Lord will surely deliver us*, and again, *ver. 32.* this he was sensible was their great stay, and therefore he is most large in his endeavours to shake this, as David's enemies, who used all the arts they had to drive him from his confidence in God, *Psal. iii. 2. xi. 1.* and thus did Christ's enemies, *Matt. xxvii. 43.*

Three things Rabshakeh suggests to discourage their confidence in God, and they are all false.

1. That Hezekiah had forfeited God's protection, and thrown himself out of it, by *destroying the high places and the altars*, *ver. 22.* Here he measures the God of Israel by the gods of the heathen, who delighted in the multitude of altars and temples, and concludes that Hezekiah had given a great offence to the God of Israel in obliging his people to one altar; thus is one of the best deeds as ever he did in his life misconstrued as impious and profane, by one that did not or would not know the law of the God of Israel; if that be represented by ignorant and malicious men as evil and a provocation to God, which is really good and pleasing to him, we must not think it strange; if this was to be sacrilegious, Hezekiah would ever be so.

2. That God had given orders for the destruction of Jerusalem at this time, *ver. 25.* *Am I now come up without the Lord?* This is all banter and rhodomontade; he did not himself think he had any commission from God to do what he did, by whom should he have it? but he hectors thus to amuse and terrify the people that were on the wall. — If he had any colour at all for what he said, it might be taken from the notice which, perhaps, he had had by the writings of the prophets of the hand of God, in the destruction of the ten tribes, and he thought he had as good a warrant for the sieging of Jerusalem as of Samaria; many that have fought against God, have pretended commissions from him.

3. That if Jehovah, the God of Israel, should undertake to protect them from the king of Assyria, yet he was not able to do it; with this blasphemy he concludes his speech, *ver. 33, 34, 35.* comparing the God of Israel with the gods of the nations whom he had conquered, and putting him upon the level with them, and concluding, that because they could not defend and deliver their worshippers, the God of Israel could not defend and deliver his. See here, (1.) His pride; every city he had conquered, he reckoned himself to have conquered the gods of that city, and valued himself mightily upon it; his high opinion of the idols, made him have a high opinion of himself as too hard for them. (2.) His profaneness; the God of Israel was not a local deity, but the God of the whole earth, the only living and true God, the Ancient of days, and had many a time proved himself to be above all gods, yet he makes no more of him than of the upstart fictitious gods of Hamath and Arpad, unfairly ar-

guing that the gods (as some now say, the priests) of all religions are the same, and himself above them all; the tradition of the Jews is, that Rabshakeh was an apostate Jew, which made him so ready in the Jews language, and if so, his ignorance of the God of Israel was the less excusable, and his enmity the less strange, for apostates are commonly the most bitter and spiteful enemies, witness Julian. — A great deal of art and management, it must be owned, there is in this speech of Rabshakeh's, but withal, a great deal of pride, malice, falsehood, and blasphemy; one grain of sincerity would have been worth all this wit and rhetoric.

Lastly, We are told what the commissioners on Hezekiah's part did, (1.) They held their peace, not for want of something to say both on God's behalf and Hezekiah's, they might easily and justly have upbraided him with his master's treachery and breach of faith, and have asked him what religion encouraged him to hope that that would prosper? At least they might have given him that grave hint which Ahab gave to Ben-hadad's like insolent demands, let not him that *girdeth on the harness boast as though he had put it off*; but the king had commanded them not to answer him, and they observed their instructions; there is a time to keep silence as well as a time to speak, and there are those to whom to offer any thing religious or rational is to cast pearls before swine; what should one talk to a mad man? It is likely their silence made Rabshakeh yet more proud and secure, and so his heart was lifted up and hardened to his destruction. (2.) They rent their clothes, in detestation of his blasphemy, and in grief for the despised, afflicted condition of Jerusalem, the reproach of which was a burthen to them. (3.) They faithfully reported the matter to the king their master, and *told him the words of Rabshakeh*, that he might consider what was to be done, what course they should take, and what answer they should return to Rabshakeh's summons.

C H A P. XIX.

Jerusalem's great distress we read of in the foregoing chapter, and left it besieged, insulted, threatened, terrified, and just ready to be swallowed up by the Assyrian army: But in this chapter, we have an account of its glorious deliverance, not by sword or bow, but by prayer and prophecy, and by the hand of an angel.

1. Hezekiah, in a great concern, sent to the prophet Isaiah to desire his prayers, ver. 1—5. and received from him an answer of peace, ver. 6, 7. 2. Sennacherib sent a letter to Hezekiah to frighten him into a surrender, ver. 8—13. 3. Hezekiah whereupon, by a very solemn prayer, recommended his case to God the righteous Judge, and begged help from him, ver. 14—19. 4. God, by Isaiah, sent him a very comfortable message, assuring him of deliverance, ver. 20—34. 5. The army of the Assyrians was all cut off by an angel, and Sennacherib himself slain by his own sons, ver. 35—37. And so God glorified himself, and saved his people.

1. **A**ND it came to pass when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD. 2. And he sent Eliakim, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz. 3. And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke and blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth. 4. It may be the LORD thy God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent, to reproach the living God; and will reprove the words which the LORD thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left. 5. So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah. 6. ¶ And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith the LORD, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. 7. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land, and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.

The contents of Rabshakeh's speech being brought to Hezekiah, one would have expected (and it is likely Rabshakeh did expect) he should have called a council of war, and it should have been debated whether it was best to capitulate or no. Before the siege he had taken counsel with his princes, and his mighty men, 2 Chron. xxxii. 3. but that would not do now; his greatest relief is, that he has a God to go to, and what passed between him and his God on this occasion, we have here an account of.

1. Hezekiah discovered a mighty concern at the dishonour done to God by Rabshakeh's blasphemy: When he heard it,

though at second hand, he *rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth*, ver. 1. Good men used to do so when they heard of any reproach cast on God's name, and great men must not think it any disparagement to them to sympathize with the injured honour of the great God. Royal robes are not too good to be rent, nor royal flesh too good to be clothed with sackcloth, in humiliation for indignities done to God, and for the perils and frights of his Jerusalem. This God now called to, and was displeased with those who were not thus affected, Isa. xxii. 12, 13, 14. *Behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing*, though it was a day of trouble and perplexity in the valley of vision, ver. 5. which refers to this very event: The king in sackcloth, but many of his subjects in soft clothing.

2. He *went up to the house of the Lord*, according to the example of the psalmist, who when he was grieved at the pride and prosperity of the wicked, *went into the sanctuary of God*, and there *understood their end*, Psal. lxxiii. 17. He went to the house of God to meditate and pray, and get his spirit into a sedate composed frame under this ruffle. He was not considering what answer to return to Rabshakeh, but refers himself to God, *Thou shalt answer, Lord, for me*; Herbert. In the house of the Lord he found a place both of rest and refuge, a treasury, a magazine, a council-chamber, and all he needed, all in God. Note, When the church's enemies are very daring and threatening, it is the wisdom and duty of the church's friends to apply themselves to God, appeal to him, and leave their cause with him.

3. He sent to the prophet Isaiah, by honourable messengers, in token of the great respect he had for him, to desire his prayers, ver. 2, 3, 4. Eliakim and Shebna were two of those that had heard the words of Rabshakeh, and were the better able both to possess and to affect Isaiah with the case. The elders of the priests were to pray for the people themselves in time of trouble, Joel ii. 17. but they must go to engage Isaiah's prayers, because he could pray better, and had a better interest in heaven. The messengers were to go in sackcloth, because they were to represent the king, who was so clothed. Their errand to Isaiah was, *Lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left*, i. e. for Judah, which is but a remnant now the ten tribes are gone; for Jerusalem, which is but a remnant now the defended cities of Judah are taken. Note, 1. It is very desirable, and what we should be desirous of when we are in trouble, to have the prayers of our friends for us. In begging it, we honour God, we honour prayer, and we honour our brethren. 2. When we desire the prayers of others for us, that must not excuse us from praying for ourselves. When Hezekiah sent to Isaiah to pray for him, he himself *went into the house of the Lord* to offer up his own prayers. 3. Those who speak from God to us, we should in a particular manner desire to speak to God for us. *He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee*, Gen. xx. 7. The great prophet is the great intercessor. 4. Those are likely to prevail with God that lift up their prayers, i. e. that lift up their hearts in prayer. 5. When the interests of God's church are brought very low, so that there is but a remnant left, few friends, and those weak and at a loss, then it is time to *lift up our prayer for that remnant*.

Two things are urged to Isaiah to engage his prayers for them.

1. Their fears of the enemy, ver. 3. He is insolent and haughty, it is a day of rebuke and blasphemy, we are despised, God is dishonoured, upon this account it is a day of trouble, never was such a king and kingdom so trampled on and abused as we are; *our soul is exceedingly filled with the contempt of the proud*; and it is a sword in our bones to hear them reproach our confidence in God, and say, where is now your God? And, which is worst of all, we see not which way we can help ourselves, and get clear of the reproach. Our cause is good, our people are faithful, but we are quite overpowered with numbers; the children are brought to the birth, now is the time, the critical moment, when, if ever, we must be relieved, one successful blow given to the enemy would do our business. But alas, we are not able to give it; *there is not strength to bring forth*. Our case is as deplorable, and calls for as speedy help, as that of a woman in travel, that is quite spent with her throws, so that she has not strength to bear the child. Compare with this Hof. xiii. 13. We are ready to perish, *if thou canst do any thing, have compassion upon us, and help us*.

2. Their hopes in God. To him they look, on him they depend to appear for them; one word from him will turn the scale, and save the sinking remnant; if he but reprove the words of Rabshakeh, i. e. disprove them, ver. 4. if he undertake to convince and confound the blasphemer, all will be well. And this they trust he will do, not for their merit's sake, but for his own honour's sake, because he has *reproached the living God*, by levelling him with dead and dumb idols. They have reason to think the issue will be good, for they can interest God in the quarrel. Psal. lxxiv. 22. *Arise, O God, plead thine own cause*. He is the Lord thy God, (say they to Isaiah) thine, whose glory thou art concerned for, and whose favour thou art interested in. He hath heard and known the blasphemous words of Rabshakeh, and therefore it may be he will hear and rebuke them. We hope he will. Help us with thy prayers to bring

bring the cause before him, and then we are content to leave it with him.

4. God, by Isaiah, sent to Hezekiah, to assure him that he would glorify himself in the ruin of the Assyrians. Hezekiah sent to Isaiah not to enquire concerning the event, as many did that sent to the prophets, shall I recover? or the like; but to desire his assistance in his duty. That was it he was solicitous about; and therefore God let him know what the event should be, in recompence of his care to do his duty, *ver. 6, 7.* 1. God interests himself in the cause; they have blasphemed me. 2. He encourages Hezekiah, who was much dismayed; *Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard:* they are but words, though big words, and hot words; and words are but wind. 3. He promised to frighten the king of Assyria worse than Rabshakeh had frightened him; *I will send a blast upon him,* that pestilential breath which killed his army, upon which terrors shall seize him, and drive him into his own country, where death shall meet him. This short threatening from the mouth of God would do execution, when all the impotent menaces that came from Rabshakeh's mouth would vanish into air.

8. ¶ So Rab-shakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah: for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish. 9. And when he heard say of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, Behold, he is come out to fight against thee: he sent messengers again unto Hezekiah, saying, 10. Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. 11. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? 12. Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Thelassar? 13. Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah? 14. ¶ And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. 15. And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, *even* thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth, thou hast made heaven and earth. 16. LORD, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, LORD, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. 17. Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations, and their lands, 18. And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods; but the work of mens hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. 19. Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, *even* thou only.

Rabshakeh having delivered his message, and received no answer, (which silence, whether he took it for a consent or a slight, doth not appear) left his army before Jerusalem, under the command of the other generals, and went himself to attend the king his master for farther orders. He found him besieging Libnah, a city that had revolted from Judah, *chap. viii. 22.* Whether he had taken Lachish or no, is not certain; some think he departed from it, because he found the taking of it impracticable, *ver. 8.* However, he was now alarmed with the rumour, that the king of the Cushites, who bordered upon the Arabians, was coming out against him with a great army, *ver. 9.* This made him very desirous to gain Jerusalem with all speed: To take it by force would cost him more time and men than he could well spare, and therefore he renews his attack upon Hezekiah, to persuade him tamely to surrender it. Having found him an easy man once, *chap. xviii. 14.* when he said, *that which thou puttest on me I will bear,* he hoped again to frighten him into a submission, but in vain. Here,

1. Sennacherib sent a letter to Hezekiah, a railing letter, a blasphemous letter, to persuade him to surrender Jerusalem; because it would be to no purpose for him to think of standing it out. His letter is to the same purpose with Rabshakeh's speech, there is nothing new offered in it. Rabshakeh had said to the people, *Let not Hezekiah deceive you,* *chap. xviii. 29.* Sennacherib writes to Hezekiah, *Let not thy God deceive thee,* *ver. 10.* Those that have the God of Jacob for their help, and whose hope is in the Lord their God, need not fear being deceived by him, as the heathens were by their gods.

To terrify Hezekiah, and drive him from his anchors, he magnifies himself and his own achievements. See how proudly he boasts, 1. Of the lands he had conquered, *ver. 11.* all lands, and destroyed utterly! How are the mole-hills of his victories swelled to mountains! So far was he from destroying all lands, that at this time, the land of Cush, and Tirhakah its king, were a terror to him. What vast hyperboles may one expect in proud mens praises of themselves! 2. Of the gods he had conquered, *ver. 12.* Each vanquished nation had its gods, which were so far from being able to deliver them, that they fell with them; and shall thy God deliver thee? 3. Of the kings he had conquered, *ver. 13.* the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad. Whether he means the prince or the idol, he means to make himself appear greater than either, and therefore very formidable, and the terror of the mighty in the land of the living.

2. Hezekiah incloseth this in another letter, a praying letter, a believing letter, and sends it to the King of kings, who judgeth among the gods. Hezekiah was not so haughty as not to receive the letter, though we may suppose the superscription did not give him his due titles; when he had received it, he was not so careless as not to read it; when he had read it, was not in such a passion as to write an answer to it in the same provoking language, but he immediately went up to the temple, presented himself, and then spread the letter before the Lord, *ver. 14.* Not as if God needed to have letters shewed him, he knew what was in it before Hezekiah did; but hereby he signified that he acknowledged God in all his ways, that he desired not to aggravate the injuries his enemies did him, or to make them appear worse than they were, but desired they might be set in a true light; and that he referred himself to God and his righteous judgment upon the whole matter. Hereby likewise he would affect himself in the prayer he came to the temple to make, and we have need of all possible helps to quicken us in that duty.

In the prayer which Hezekiah prayed over this letter,

1. He adores the God whom Sennacherib had blasphemed, *ver. 15.* calls him the God of Israel, because Israel was his peculiar people; and the God that dwelt between the cherubims, because there was the peculiar residence of his glory upon earth, but gives glory to him as the God of the whole earth, and not as Sennacherib fancied him to be the God of Israel only, and confined to the temple: Let them say what they will, thou art sovereign Lord, for thou art the God, the God of gods; sole Lord, even thou alone; universal Lord of all the kingdoms of the earth; and rightful Lord, for thou hast made heaven and earth. Being creator of all, by an uncontestable title thou art owner and ruler of all.

2. He appeals to God concerning the insolence and profaneness of Sennacherib, *ver. 16.* Lord, hear; Lord, see. Here it is under his own hand; here it is in black and white. Had Hezekiah only been abused, he would have passed it by; but it is God, the living God that is reproached, the jealous God. Lord, what wilt thou do for thy great name?

3. He owns Sennacherib's triumphs over the gods of the heathen, but distinguisheth between them and the God of Israel, *ver. 17, 18.* They have indeed cast their gods into the fire; for they were no gods, unable to help either themselves or their worshippers, and therefore no wonder they have destroyed them; and in destroying them, though they know it not, they really served the justice and jealousy of the God of Israel, who has determined to furnish all the gods of the heathen. But they are deceived who think they can therefore be too hard for him. He is none of the gods whom men's hands had made, but who has himself made all things, *Psal. cxv. 3, 4.*

4. He prays that God would now glorify himself in the defeat of Sennacherib, and the deliverance of Jerusalem out of his hands, *ver. 19.* Now therefore save us; for if we be conquered, as other lands are, they will say that thou art conquered, as the gods of those lands were; but, Lord, distinguish thyself, by distinguishing us, and let all the world know, and be made to confess, that thou art the Lord God, the self-existent, sovereign God, *even* thou only, and that all pretenders are vanity and a lie. Note, The best pleas in prayer are those which are taken from God's honour, and the concerns of that; and therefore the Lord's prayer begins with *hallowed be thy name,* and concludes with *thine is the glory.*

20. ¶ Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard. 21. This is the word that the LORD hath spoken concerning him, The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn, the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. 22. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lift up thine eyes on high? *even* against the holy One of Israel. 23. By thy messengers thou hast reproached

reproached the LORD, and hath said, With the multitude of my chariots I am come up to the height of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon, and will cut down the tall cedar-trees thereof, and the choice fir-trees thereof: and I will enter into the lodgings of his borders, and into the forest of his Carmel. 24. I have digged and drunk strange waters, and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of besieged places. 25. Hast thou not heard long ago, how I have done it, and of ancient times, that I have formed it? now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste fenced cities into ruinous heaps. 26. Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded, they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass on the house-tops, and as corn blasted before it be grown up. 27. But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. 28. Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest. 29. And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same, and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof. 30. And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah, shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. 31. For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this. 32. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, he shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. 33. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. 34. For I will defend this city to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant Davids sake.

We have here the gracious copious answer which God gave to Hezekiah's prayer. The message which he sent him by the same hand, ver. 6, 7. one would think had been an answer sufficient to his prayer; but that he might have strong consolation, he is encouraged by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, Heb. vi. 18. In general, God assures him that his prayer was heard, his prayer against Sennacherib, ver. 20. Note, The case of those is miserable, that have the prayers of God's people against them: For if the oppressed cry to God against the oppressor, he will hear, Exod. xxii. 23. God hears and answers; hears with the saving strength of his right hand, Psal. xx. 6.

This message speaks two things,

1. Confusion and shame to Sennacherib, and his forces. It is here foretold, that he should be humbled and broken. The prophet elegantly directs his speech to him, as he doth, Isa. x. 5. *O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger.* Not that this message was sent to him, but what is here said to him he was made to know by the event; Providence spoke it to him with a witness; and, perhaps, his own heart was made to whisper this to him; for God has more ways than one of speaking to sinners in his wrath, so as to vex them in his sore displeasure, Psal. ii. 5.

Sennacherib is here represented,

(1.) As the scorn of Jerusalem, ver. 21. He thought himself the terror of the daughter of Zion, that chaste and beautiful virgin, and that by his threats he could force her to submit to him; but being a virgin in her Father's house, and under his protection, she defies thee, despiseth thee, laughs thee to scorn. Thine impotent malice is ridiculous; he that sits in heaven laughs at thee, and therefore so do those that abide under his shadow. By this word God intended to silence the fears of Hezekiah and his people. Though to an eye of sense the enemy looked formidable, to an eye of faith he looked despicable.

(2.) As an enemy to God, and that was enough to make him miserable. Hezekiah pleaded this; Lord, he has reproached thee, ver. 16. So he has, saith God, and I take it as against my self, ver. 22. *Whom hast thou reproached?* Is it not the holy One of Israel? whose honour is dear to him, and who has power to vindicate it, which the gods of the heathen have not. *Nemo me impune lacesset.*

(3.) As a proud vain-glorious fool, that spoke great swelling words of vanity, and boasted of a false gift, by his brags as well as by his threats, reproaching the Lord. For, 1. He magnified his own achievements out of measure, and quite above what really they were, ver. 23, 24. thou hast said so and so. This was not in the letter he wrote, but God lets Hezekiah know he

not only saw what was written there, but heard what he said elsewhere, probably, in the speeches he made to his councils or armies. Note, God takes notice of the boast of proud men, and will call them to an account, that he may look upon them, and abase them, Job xl. 11. What a mighty figure doth Sennacherib think he makes! driving his chariots to the tops of the highest mountains, forcing his way through woods and rivers, breaking through all difficulties, making himself master of all he had a mind of; nothing could stand before him, or be withheld from him; no hills too high for him to climb, no trees too strong for him too fell, no waters too deep for him to dry up, as if he had the power of a God to speak and it is done. 2. He took to himself the glory of doing these great things, whereas they were all the Lord's doing, ver. 25, 26. Sennacherib, in his letter, had appealed to what Hezekiah had heard, ver. 11. *Thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done;* but in answer to that, he is minded of what God has done for Israel of old, drying up the Red sea, leading them through the wilderness, planting them in Canaan; what are all thy doings to these? And as for the desolations thou hast made in the earth, and particularly in Judah, thou art but the instrument in God's hand, a meer tool, it is I that have brought it to pass, I gave thee thy power, gave thee thy success, and made thee what thou art; raised thee up to lay waste fenced cities, and so to punish them for their wickedness, and therefore their inhabitants were of small power. What a foolish insolent thing was it for him to exalt himself above God, and against God, upon that which he had done by him and under him. Sennacherib's brags here are expounded, Isa. x. 13, 14. *By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, &c.* and they are answered, ver. 15. *Shall the ax boast himself against him that heweth therewith?* No, it is absurd for the fly upon the wheel to say, what a dust do I make? or for the sword in the hand to say, what execution do I do? If God be the principal agent in all that is done, boasting is for ever excluded.

(4.) As under the check and rebuke of that God whom he blasphemed. All his motions were, 1. Under the divine cognizance, ver. 27. *I know thy abode,* and what thou doest secretly devise and design; *thy going out and coming in,* marches and counter-marches, and thy rage against me and my people, the tumult of thy passions, the tumult of thy preparations, the noise and bluster thou makest, I know it all. That was more than Hezekiah did, who wished for intelligence of the enemies motions; but what needed it, when the eye of God was a constant spy upon him, 2 Chron. xvi. 9. 2. Under the divine controul, ver. 28. *I will put my hook in thy nose,* thou great Leviathan, Job xli. 1, 2. *My bridle in thy jaws,* thou great Behemoth. I will restrain thee, manage thee, turn thee where I please, send thee home, *re infecta*, like a fool as thou camest. Note, It is a great comfort to all the church's friends, that God has a hook in the nose, and a bridle in the jaws of all her enemies; can make even their wrath to serve and praise him, and then restrain the remainder of it: *Here shall its proud waves be staid.*

2. Salvation had joy to Hezekiah and his people. This shall be a sign to them of God's favour, and that he is reconciled to them, and his anger is turned away, Isa. xli. 1. a wonder in their eyes, (for so a sign sometimes signifies) a token for good, and an earnest of the farther mercy God has in store for them, that a good issue shall be put to their present distress in every respect.

1. Provisions were scarce and dear, and what should they do for food? The fruits of the earth were devoured by the Assyrian army, Isa. xxxii. 9, 10, &c. Why, they shall not only dwell in the land, but verily they shall be fed: If God save them, he will not starve them, nor let them die by famine, when they had escaped the sword: *Eat ye this year that which groweth of itself,* and you shall find enough of that. Did the Assyrians reap what you sowed? you shall reap what you did not sow. But the next year was the sabbatical year, when the land was to rest, and they must neither sow nor reap. What must they do that year? Why, *Jehovah jireh*, The Lord will provide, God's blessing shall save them feed and labour, and that year too the voluntary products of the earth shall serve to maintain them, to mind them that the earth brought forth before there was a man to till it, Gen. i. 11. And then the third year their husbandry should return into its former channel, and they should sow and reap as they used to do.

2. The country was laid waste, families were broken up and scattered, and all was in confusion; how should it be otherwise, when it was over-run by such an army. As to this, it is promised, that the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah, i. e. of the country people, shall yet again be planted in their own habitations, upon their own estates, shall take root there, shall increase and grow rich, ver. 30. See how their prosperity is described, it is taking root downward, and bearing fruit upward, being well fixed, and well provided for themselves, and then doing good to others. Such is the prosperity of the soul, it is taking root downwards by faith in Christ, and then being fruitful in fruits of righteousness.

3. The city was shut up; none went out or came in, but now the remnant in Jerusalem and Zion shall go forth freely, and there should be none to hinder them, or make them afraid, *ver.* 31. Great destruction had been made both in city and country, but in both there was a remnant that escaped, which typified the saved remnant of Israelites indeed, as appears by comparing *Isa.* x. 22, 23. which speaks of this very event, with *Rom.* ix. 27, 28. they shall go forth into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

4. The Assyrians were advancing towards Jerusalem, and would in a little time besiege it in form, and it was in great danger of falling into their hands: But it is here promised the siege they feared should be prevented, though the enemy were now (as it should seem) encamped before the city, yet they shall never come into the city, no nor so much as shoot an arrow into it, *ver.* 32, 33. He shall be forced to retire with shame, and a thousand times to repent his undertaking. God himself undertakes to defend the city, *ver.* 34. And that person, that place cannot but be safe which he undertakes the protection of.

5. The honour and truth of God are engaged for the doing of all this. These are great things, but how will they be effected? Why, the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this, *ver.* 31. He is Lord of hosts, has all creatures at his beck, therefore he is able to do it; he is jealous for Jerusalem with great jealousy, *Zech.* i. 14. having espoused her a chaste virgin to himself, he will not suffer her to be abused, *ver.* 21. You have reason to think yourselves unworthy that such great things should be done for you, but God's own zeal will do it. His zeal, 1. For his own honour, *ver.* 34. I will do it for my own sake, to make me an everlasting name. God's reasons of mercy are fetched from within himself. 2. For his own truth: I will do it for my servant David's sake; not for the sake of his merit, but the promise made to him, and the covenant made with him, those sure mercies of David. Thus all the deliverances of the church are wrought for the sake of Christ, the son of David.

35. ¶ And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians, an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. 36. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. 37. And it came to pass as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his God, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia; and Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.

Sometimes it was long ere prophecies were accomplished, and promises performed; but here the word was no sooner spoken, but the work was done.

1. The army of Assyria was entirely routed. That night, which immediately followed the sending of this message to Hezekiah, when the enemy was just set down before the city, and were preparing (as we now say) to open the trenches, that night was the main body of their army slain upon the spot by an angel, *ver.* 35. Hezekiah had not force sufficient to fall out upon them, and attack their camp, nor would God do it by sword or bow, but he sent his angel, a destroying angel, in the dead of the night, to make an assault upon them, which their centinels, though never so wakeful, could neither discover nor resist. It was not by the sword of a mighty man, or of a mean man, *i. e.* not of any man at all, but of an angel, that the Assyrian army was to fall, *Isa.* xxxi. 8. such an angel as slew the first-born of Egypt. Josephus saith, it was done by a pestilential disease, which was their death presently. The number slain was very great, one hundred and eighty five thousand men, and Rabshakeh, it is likely, among the rest. When the besieged arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses, scarce a living man among them. Some think the seventy sixth Psalm was penned on this occasion, where we read, that the stout-hearted were spoiled, and slept their sleep, their last, their long sleep, *ver.* 5. See how great in power and might the holy angels are, when one angel, in one night, could make so great a slaughter. See how weak the mightiest of men are before almighty God: who ever hardened himself against him and prospered? The pride and blasphemy of the king is punished by the destruction of his army. All these lives are sacrificed to God's glory, and Zion's safety. The prophet shews, that therefore God suffered this vast rendezvous to be made, that they might be gathered as sheaves into the floor, *Mic.* iv. 12, 13.

2. The king of Assyria was hereby put into the utmost confusion; ashamed to see himself, after all his proud boasts, thus defeated, and disabled to pursue his conquests, and secure what he had, (for this, we may suppose, was the flower of his army) and continually afraid of falling under the like stroke himself. He departed, and went, and returned; the manner of the expression intimates the great disorder and distraction of mind he was in, *ver.* 36. and it was not long but God cut him off too, by the

hands of two of his own sons, *ver.* 37. (1.) They that did it were very wicked, to kill their own father, whom they were bound to protect, and in the act of his devotion; monstrous villainy! But, (2.) God was righteous in it. Justly are the sons suffered to rebel against their father that begat them, when he was in rebellion against the God that made him. They, whose children are undutiful to them, ought to consider, whether they have not been so to their Father in heaven. The God of Israel had done enough to convince him, that he was the only true God, whom therefore he ought to worship; yet he persists in his idolatry, and seeks to his false god for protection, against a God of irresistible power. Justly is his blood mingled with his sacrifices, who will not be convinced by such a plain and dear-bought demonstration of his folly in worshipping idols.

His sons that murdered him were suffered to escape, and no pursuit made after them; his own kingdom, perhaps, being weary of the government of so proud a man, and thinking themselves well rid of him. And his sons would be looked upon as the more excusable in what they had done, if it be true which bishop Patrick suggested, that he was now vowing to sacrifice them to his god, so that it was for their own preservation that they sacrificed him. His successor was another son, Esarhaddon; who (as it should seem) did not aim, like his father, to enlarge his conquests, but rather to improve them; for he it was that first sent colonies of Assyrians to inhabit the country of Samaria, though it be mentioned before, *chap.* xvii. 24. as appears, *Ezra* iv. 2. where the Samaritans say, it was Esarhaddon that brought them thither.

C H A P. XX.

In this chapter we have, 1. Hezekiah's sickness, and his recovery from that in answer to prayer, in performance of a promise, in the use of means, and confirmed with a sign, *ver.* 1—11. 2. Hezekiah's sin, and his recovery from that, *ver.* 12—19. In both these Isaiah was God's messenger to him. 3. The conclusion of his reign, *ver.* 20, 21.

1. **I**N those days was Hezekiah sick unto death: and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live. 2. Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, 3. I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight: and Hezekiah wept sore. 4. And it came to pass afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 5. Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee; on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD. 6. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years, and I will deliver thee, and this city, out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. 7. And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered. 8. ¶ And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What shall be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the LORD the third day? 9. And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? 10. And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. 11. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the LORD, and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz.

The historian having shewed us blaspheming Sennacherib destroyed in the midst of the prospects of life, here shews us praying Hezekiah delivered in the midst of the prospects of death, the days of the former shortened, of the latter prolonged.

1. Here is Hezekiah's sickness. — In those days, *i. e.* in the same year in which the king of Assyria besieged Jerusalem, for he reigning in all twenty nine years, and surviving this fifteen years, this must be in his fourteenth year, and so was that, *chap.* xviii. 13. — Some think it was at the time that the Assyrian army was besieging the city, or preparing for it, because God promiseth, *ver.* 6. I will defend the city, which promise was afterwards repeated, when the danger came to be most imminent, *chap.* xix. 34. Others think it was soon after the defeat of

Sennacherib, and then it shews us the uncertainty of all our comforts in this world; Hezekiah, in the midst of his triumphs, in the favour of God, and over the forces of his enemies, is seized with sickness, and under the arrests of death; we must therefore always rejoice with trembling. — It should seem he was sick of the plague, for we read of the boil or plague-fore, *ver. 7*. The same disease which was killing to the Assyrians was trying to him; God took it from him, and put it upon his enemies. — Neither greatness nor goodness can exempt from sickness, from sore and mortal sicknesses. Hezekiah, lately favoured of heaven above most men, yet is sick unto death, in the midst of his days, under forty, and yet sick and dying, and, perhaps, he was the more apprehensive of its being fatal to him, because his father died when he was about his age, two or three years younger; in the midst of life we are in death.

2. Warning brought him to prepare for death, it is brought by Isaiah, who had been twice in the former chapter a messenger of good tidings to him; we cannot expect to receive from God's prophets any other than what they have received from the Lord, and that we must bid welcome, be it pleasing or unpleasing; he tells him, (1.) That his disease was mortal, and, if he were not recovered by a miracle of mercy, would be certainly fatal; *thou shalt die, and not live*. (2.) That therefore he must with all speed get ready for death; this we are most highly concerned to do when we are in health, but are most loudly called to do when we come to be sick; set the heart in order by renewed acts of repentance and faith, and resignation to God, with cheerful farewells to this world, and welcomes to another; and if it be not done before, (which is the best and wisest course) set the house in order, make thy will, settle thy estate, put thine affairs in the best posture thou canst, for the ease of those that shall come after thee; Isaiah speaks not to Hezekiah of his kingdom; only of his house; David being a prophet, had authority to appoint who should reign after him, but other kings did not pretend to bequeath their crowns, as part of their goods and chattels.

3. His prayer hereupon; *He prayed unto the Lord*, *ver. 2*. Is any sick? let him be prayed for, let him be prayed with, and let him pray; Hezekiah had found in the foregoing chapter, that it was not in vain to wait upon God, but that the prayers of faith bring in answers of peace, therefore will he *call upon God as long as he lives*; happy returns of prayer are engagements and encouragements to continue instant in prayer; he had now received the sentence of death within himself, and, (1.) If it were reversible, it must be reversed by prayer; when God purposeth mercy, he will *for this be enquired of*, *Ezek. xxxvii. 37*. We have not, if we ask not, or ask amiss. (2.) If not, prayer is one of the best preparations for death, because by it we fetch in strength and grace from God to enable us to finish well. Observe,

(1.) The circumstances of this prayer. 1. He turned his face to the wall, probably, as he lay in his bed; this he did either for privacy, he could not retire to his closet as he used to do, but he retired as well as he could, turned from the company that were about him to converse with God. — When we cannot be so private as we would be in our devotions, nor perform them with the usual outward expressions of reverence and solemnity, yet we must not therefore omit them, but compose ourselves to them as well as we can; or, as some think, he turned his face towards the temple, to shew how willingly he would have gone up thither to pray this prayer, as he did, *chap. xviii. 1, 14*. if he had been able, and remembering what encouragements were given to all the prayers that should be made in or towards that house. — Christ is our temple, to him we must have an eye in all our prayers, for no man, no service comes to the Father but by him. — 2. He wept sore; some gather from hence that he was unwilling to die; it is in the nature of man to have some dread of the separation of soul and body, and it was not strange, if the Old Testament saints, to whom another world was but darkly revealed, were not so willing to leave this as St. Paul and other New Testament saints were; there was also something peculiar in Hezekiah's case, he was now in the midst of his usefulness, had begun a good work of reformation, which he feared, if he should die, through the corruption of the people, would fall to the ground; if this was before the defeat of the Assyrian army, as some think, he might therefore be loth to die, because his kingdom was in imminent danger of being ruined; however, it doth not appear that he had now any son, Manasseh, that succeeded him, was not born till three years after, and if he die childless, both the peace of his kingdom, and the promise to David would be in danger: but, perhaps, these were only tears of importunity, and expressions of a lively affection in prayer; Jacob wept and made supplication, and our blessed Saviour, though most willing to die, yet offered up strong cries, with tears, to him that he knew able to save him, *Heb. v. 7*. Let Hezekiah's prayer interpret his tears, and in that we find nothing that speaks him under any of that fear of death, which has either bondage or torment.

(2.) The prayer itself; *Remember now, O Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth*, and either spare me to live; that I

may continue thus to walk, or, if my work be done, receive me to that glory which thou hast prepared for those that have thus walked. — Observe here, 1. The description of Hezekiah's piety, he had had his conversation in the world with right intentions, I have walked before thee, as under thine eye, and with an eye ever towards thee; from a right principle, *in truth, and with an upright heart*; and by a right rule, *I have done that which is good in thy sight*. 2. The comfort he now had in reflection upon it, it made his sick bed easy. Note, The testimony of conscience for us, that we have walked with God in our integrity, will be much our support and rejoicing when we come to look death in the face, *2 Cor. i. 12*. 3. The humble mention he makes of it to God, *Lord, remember it now*, not as if God needed to be put in mind of any thing by us, he is greater than our hearts, and knows all things, or as if the reward were of debt, and might be demanded as due, it is Christ's righteousness only that is the purchase of mercy and grace, but our own sincerity may be pleaded as the condition of the covenant which God has wrought in us; it is the work of thine own hands, Lord, own it. — Hezekiah doth not pray, Lord, spare me, or, Lord, take me, God's will be done; but, *Lord, remember me, whether I live or die let me be thine*.

4. The answer which God immediately gave to this prayer of Hezekiah's; the prophet was got but to the middle court when he was sent back with another message to Hezekiah, *ver. 4, 5*. to tell him that he should recover, not that there is with God yea or nay, or that he ever faith and unfaith, but upon Hezekiah's prayer, which he foresaw, and which his spirit inclined him to, God did that for him, which otherwise he would not have done; God here calls Hezekiah the captain of his people, to intimate that he would relieve him for his people's sake, because in this time of war, they could ill spare such a captain; he calls himself the God of David, to intimate that he would relieve him, out of a regard to the covenant made with David, and the promise that he would always ordain a lamp for him.

In this answer, (1.) God honours his prayers, by the notice he takes of them, and the reference he has to them in this message, *I have heard thy prayers, I have seen thy tears*; prayers that have much life and affection in them, are in a special manner pleasing to God. — (2.) God out-does his prayers; he only begged God would remember his integrity, but God here promiseteth, 1. To recover him from his illness, *I will heal thee*; diseases are his servants, as they go where he sends them, so they come when he remands them, *Matt. viii. 8, 9. I am the Lord that healeth thee*, *Exod. xv. 26*. 2. To restore him to such a degree of health, that *on the third day he should go up to the house of the Lord*, to return thanks; God knew Hezekiah's heart, how dearly he loved the habitation of God's house, and the place where his honour dwelt, and that as soon as he was well he would go to attend on publick ordinances; thitherward he turned his face when he was sick, and thitherward he would turn his feet when he was recovered, and therefore, because nothing would please him better, he promiseteth him this, *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee*; the man whom Christ healed was presently found in the temple, *John v. 14*. 3. To add fifteen years to his life, this would not bring him to be an old man, it would reach but to fifty four or fifty five, yet that was longer than he had now lately expected to live. — His lease was renewed, which he thought was expiring; we have not the instance of any other, that was told before-hand just how long he should live; that good man, no doubt, made a good use of it, but God has wisely kept us at uncertainties, that we may be always ready. 4. To deliver Jerusalem from the king of Assyria, *ver. 6*. This was the thing which Hezekiah's heart was upon as much as his own recovery, and therefore the promise of this is here repeated; if this was after the raising of the siege, yet there was cause to fear Sennacherib's rallying again, no, faith God, *I will defend this city*.

5. The means which were to be used for his recovery, *ver. 7*. Isaiah was his physician, he ordered an outward application, a very cheap and common thing, lay a lump of figs to the boil, to ripen it, and bring it to a head, that the matter of the disease may be discharged that way; this might contribute something to the cure, and yet considering to what a height the disease was come, and how suddenly it was checked, the cure was no less than miraculous. Note, (1.) It is our duty when we are sick, to make use of such means as are proper to help nature, else we do not trust God but tempt him. (2.) Plain and ordinary medicines must not be despised, for many such God has graciously made serviceable to man, in consideration of the poor. (3.) What God appoints, he will succeed and make effectual.

6. The sign which was given for the encouragement of his faith. 1. He begged it, not in any distrust of the power or promise of God, or as if he staggered at that, but because he looked upon the things promised to be very great things, and worthy to be so confirmed, and because it had been usual with God thus to glorify himself, and favour his people; and he remembered how much God was displeased with his father for refusing to ask a sign, *Isa. vii. 10, 11, 12*. — Observe, Hezekiah asked, *What is the sign*, not that I shall go up to the thrones of

judgment, or up to the gate, but up to the house of the Lord, therefore he desired to recover, that he might glorify God in the gates of the daughter of Zion. — It is not worth while to live for any other purpose but to serve God. — 2. It was put to his choice whether the sun should go back or go forward, for it was equal to Omnipotence, and it would be the more likely to confirm his faith, if he chose that which he thought the more difficult of the two; perhaps, to this, that of this prophet may refer, *Isa. xlv. 11. Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me*; the degrees are supposed to be half hours, and that it was just noon when the proposal was made, and the question is, Shall the sun go back to its place at seven in the morning, or forward to its place at five in the evening. 3. He humbly desired the sun might go back ten degrees, because, though either would be a great miracle, yet it being the natural course of the sun to go forward, its going back would seem more strange, and would be more significant of Hezekiah's returning to the days of his youth, *John xxxiii. 25.* and the lengthning out of the day of his life; it was accordingly done upon the prayer of *Isaiah, ver. 11. he cried unto the Lord* by special warrant and direction, and God brought the sun back ten degrees, which appeared to Hezekiah, (for the sign was intended for him) for the going back of the shadow upon the dial of Ahaz, which, it is likely, he could see through his chamber window, and the same was observed upon all other dials, even in Babylon, *2 Chron. xxxii. 31.* Whether this retrograde motion of the sun was gradual, or, *per saltum*, whether he walked back at the same pace that he used to go forward, which would make the day ten hours longer than usual, or whether he leaped back on a sudden, which continued but a little while, and then all was restored again to their usual place, so that no change was made in the state of the heavenly bodies (as the learned bishop Patrick thinks) we are not told; but this work of wonder shews the power of God in heaven as well as on earth, the great notice he takes of prayer, and the great favour he bears to his chosen; the most plausible idolatry of the heathen was theirs that worshipped the sun, yet that was hereby convicted of the most egregious folly and absurdity, for by this it appeared that their god was under the check of the God of Israel: Dr. Lightfoot suggests that the fifteen songs of degrees, *Psal. cxx. &c.* might, perhaps, be so called, because picked out by Hezekiah to be sung to his stringed instruments, *Isa. xxxviii. 21.* in remembrance of the degrees on the dial which the sun went back, and the fifteen years added to his life, and observes how much of these psalms is applicable to Jerusalem's distress and deliverance, and Hezekiah's sickness and recovery.

12. ¶ At that time Berodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. 13. And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not. 14. ¶ Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon. 15. And he said, what have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures, that I have not shewed them. 16. And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD. 17. Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. 18. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. 19. Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days? 20. ¶ And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 21. And Hezekiah slept with his fathers: and Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

Here is, 1. An embassy sent to Hezekiah by the king of Babylon, to congratulate his recovery, *ver. 12.* The kings of Babylon had hitherto been only deputies and tributaries to the kings of Assyria, and Nineveh was the royal city: We find Babylon

subject to the king of Assyria, *chap. xvii. 24.* But this king of Babylon began to set up for himself, and by degrees the tables turned, and Assyria became subject to the kings of Babylon. This king of Babylon sent to compliment Hezekiah, and ingratiate himself with him upon a double account. (1.) Upon the account of religion. The Babylonians worshipped the sun, and perceiving what honour their god had done to Hezekiah, in going back for his sake, they thought themselves obliged to do honour to him likewise. It is good having those our friends, whom we perceive to be the favourites of heaven. (2.) Upon the account of civil interest. If the king of Babylon was now meditating a revolt from the king of Assyria, it was policy to get Hezekiah into his interest, in answer to whose prayers, and for whose protection, heaven had given that fatal blow to the king of Assyria. He found himself obliged to Hezekiah, and his God, for the weakening of the Assyrian forces, and had reason to think he could not have a more powerful and valuable ally, than one that had so good an interest in the upper world. He therefore made his court to him with all possible respect, by ambassadors, letters, and a present.

2. The kind entertainment Hezekiah gave to these ambassadors, *ver. 13.* He ought to be civil to them, and receive them with the respect due to ambassadors; but he exceeded, and did it to a fault. (1.) He was too fond of them. He *hearkened unto them.* Though they were idolaters, yet he became intimate with them, was forward to come into a confederacy with the king their master, and granted them all they came for. He was more open and free than he should have been, and stood not so much upon his guard. What reason had he that was in covenant with God, so eagerly to catch at an alliance with a heathen prince, or to value himself at all upon his respects? What honour could this embassy add to one whom God had so highly favoured, that he should please himself so much with it? (2.) He was too fond of shewing them his palace, his treasures, and his magazines, that they might see, and might report to their master what a great king he was, and how well worthy of the honour their master did him. It is not said that he shewed them the temple, the book of the law, and the manner of his worship, that he might proselyte them to the true religion, which he had now a fair opportunity of doing; but in compliment to them, lest that should affront them, he waved that, and shewed them the rich furniture of his closet, that house of his precious things, the wealth he had heaped up since the king of Assyria had emptied his coffers, his *silver, and gold, and spices.* All the valuable things he had he shewed them, either himself, or by his officers. And what harm was there in this? What more commonly, and we think, more innocently done, than to shew strangers the riches and rarities of a country? To shew our friends our houses and their furniture, gardens, stables, libraries? But if we do this in the pride of our hearts, as Hezekiah did, to gain applause from men, and not giving praise to God, it turns into sin to us, as it did to him.

3. The examination of Hezekiah concerning this matter, *ver. 14, 15.* Isaiah, that had oft been his comforter, is now his reprover. The blessed Spirit is both, *John xvi. 7, 8.* Ministers must be both as there is occasion. Isaiah spoke in God's name, and therefore called him to account as one having authority: Who are these? whence come they? what is their business? what have they seen? Hezekiah not only submitted to the examination, did not ask him, What was that to him? what had he to do to question him? but made an ingenuous confession, *There is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them.* Why then did he not bring them to Isaiah, and shew him to them, who was, without doubt, the best treasure he had in his dominions, and who by his prayers and prophecies had been instrumental in all those wonders, which these ambassadors came to enquire into? I hope Hezekiah had the same value for Isaiah now, that he had in his distress; but it had become him to shew it, by bringing these ambassadors to him in the first place, which might have prevented that false step he took.

4. The sentence passed upon him for his pride and vanity, and the too great relish he had of the things of the world, after that intimate acquaintance he had so lately been admitted into with divine things. The sentence is, *ver. 17, 18.* (1.) That the treasures he was so proud of, should hereafter become a prey, and his family should be robbed of them all. It is just with God, to take that from us, which we make the matter of our pride, and in which we put our confidence. (2.) That the king of Babylon, he was so fond of an alliance with, should be the enemy that should make a prey of them. Not that it was for this sin that that judgment should be brought upon them: The sins of Manasseh, his idolatries and murders were the cause of that calamity; but it is now foretold to Hezekiah, to convince him of the folly of his pride, and of the value he had for the king of Babylon, and to make him ashamed of it. Hezekiah was fond of assisting the king of Babylon to rise, and to reduce the exorbitant power of the kings of Assyria, but is told, that the snake he is cherishing, will ere long sting the bosom that cherisheth it, and that his royal seed should become the king of Babylon's slaves, which was fulfilled, *Dan. i. 1.* than the thought of which

which there could not be a greater mortification to Hezekiah. Those that are fond of Babylon, Babylon will be their ruin: Wife therefore and happy are they that *come out from her*, Rev. xviii. 4.

5. Hezekiah's humble and patient submission to this sentence, *ver. 29*. Observe how he argues himself into this submission. (1.) He lays it down for a truth, that *good is the word of the Lord*, even this word, though a threatening, for every word of his is so. It is not only just but good; for as he doth no wrong to any, so he means no hurt to good men. It is good, for he will bring good out of it, and do me good by the foresight of it. We should believe this concerning every providence, that it is good, is working for good. (2.) He takes notice of that in this word which was good, that he should not live to see this evil, much less to share in it. He makes the best of bad; is it not good? Yes, certainly it is, and better than I deserve. Note, 1. True penitents, when they are under divine rebukes, call them not only just, but good; not only submit to, but accept of the punishment of their iniquity. So Hezekiah did, and by this it appeared he was indeed *bumbled for the pride of his heart*. 2. When at any time we are under dark dispensations, or have dark prospects, publick or personal, we must take notice of what is for us, as well as of what is against us, that we may by thanksgiving honour God, and may in our patience possess our own souls. 3. As to publick affairs it is good, and we are bound to think it so, *if peace and truth be in our days*. That is, (1.) Whatever else we want, it is good if we have peace and truth; if we have the true religion professed and protected, bibles and ministers, and enjoy these in peace, not terrified with the alarms of war or persecution. (2.) Whatever trouble may come when we are gone, it is good if all be well in our days. Not that we may be unconcerned for posterity, it is a grief to foresee evils; but thus far we must own, that the debarring of judgments is a great favour in general: and to have them deferred so long as that we may die in peace, is a particular favour to us, for charity begins at home. We know not how we shall bear the trial, and therefore have reason to think it well, if we may but get safe to heaven before it comes.

Lastly, Here is the conclusion of Hezekiah's life and story, *ver. 30, 31*. In the sacred Chronicles, *lib. 2. chap. xxix. 30*, and *31*. much more is recorded of Hezekiah's work of reformation than is in this book of Kings; and it seems in the civil chronicles, not now extant, there were many things recorded of his might, and the good offices he did for Jerusalem, particularly his bringing water by pipes into the city. To have water in plenty, without striving for it, and not terrified with the noise of archers in the drawing of it, to have it at hand, and convenient for us, is to be reckoned a great mercy, for the want of water would be a great calamity. But here this historian leaves him *after with his fathers*, and a son in his throne that proved very untoward; for parents cannot give grace to their children. Wicked Ahaz, was the son of a godly father, and the father of a godly son; holy Hezekiah was the son of a wicked father, and the father of a wicked son. When the land was not reformed, as it should have been, by a good reign, it was plagued and ripened for ruin by a bad one; yet then tried again with a good one, that it might appear how both God was to cut off his people.

C H A P. XXI.

*In this chapter we have a short but full account of the reign of one of the kings of Judah, Manasseh and Ahaz. 1. Concerning Manasseh. All the account we have of him here is, (1.) That he learned him to be an idolater, and murderer, *ver. 1-2*. and *ver. 15*. (2.) That therefore God learned him, and Jerusalem for his sake, to ruin, *ver. 10-13*. In the book of Chronicles we have an account of his crimes, and his repentance. 2. Concerning Ahaz we are only told that he lived by *im. ver. 10-20*. and *quidly by the sword*, and that his godly father, *ver. 25-26*. By which we may see that his father was much disaffected, and much wicked, and that he lived upon words in destruction, which *Manasseh* did.*

1. **M**anasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Hephzi-bah. 2. And he did what which was evil in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cut out before the children of Israel. 3. For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. 4. And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD said, In Jerusalem will I put my name. 5. And he built altars for all the host of heaven, in the two courts of the house of the LORD. 6. And he made his son

pass through the fire; and observed times; and used incantments, and dealt with familiar spirits, and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. 7. And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made, in the house of which the LORD said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever. 8. Neither will I make the feet of Israel move any more out of the land which I gave their fathers; only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them. 9. But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations, whom the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel.

How delightful were our meditations on the last reign; how many pleasing views had we of Sion in its glory, that is, in its purity and in its triumphs, of the king in his beauty; it is spoken of Hezekiah; *Ija. xxxiii. 17*. and as it follows there, *ver. 20*. Jerusalem a quiet habitation, because a city of righteousness, *Ija. i. 26*. But now we have melancholy work upon our hands, unpleasant ground to travel, and cannot but drive heavily. *How is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed!* The beauty of Jerusalem is stained, and all her glory, all her joy sunk and gone. These verses give such an account of this reign, as make it in all respects the reverse of the last, and in a manner the ruin of it.

1. Manasseh began young: He was but *twelve years old when he began to reign*, *ver. 1*. born when his father was about forty two years old, three years after his sickness. If he had sons before, either they were dead, or set by as unpromising. This, as yet, they knew no ill by, and therefore hoped for good from; but he proved very bad, and perhaps his coming to the crown so young might help to make it so, which yet will by no means excuse him, for his grandson Josiah came to it younger than he, and yet did very well. But being young, (1.) He was puffed up with his honour, and proud of it; and thinking himself very wise, because he was very great, valued himself upon his undoing what his father had done. It is too common for novices to be lifted up with pride, and so to fall into the condemnation of the devil. (2.) He was easily wrought upon and drawn aside by seducers, that lay in wait to deceive. They that were enemies to Hezekiah's reformation, and retained an affection for the old idolatries, flattered him, and so gained his ear, and used his power at their pleasure. Many have been undone by coming too soon to their honours and estates.

2. He reigned long, longest of any of the kings of Judah, fifty five years. This was the only very bad reign that was a long one; Joram's was but eight years, and Ahaz's sixteen; but for Manasseh's, we hope that in the beginning of his reign for some time things went pretty well, in the course that his father left them in: and that in the latter end of his reign, after his repentance, religion got head again; and, no doubt, when things were at the worst, God had his remnant that kept their integrity. Though he reigned long, yet some of this time he was a prisoner in Babylon, which may well be looked upon as a drawback from these years, yet pass in the number, because then he repented, and began to reform.

3. He reigned very ill. (1.) *He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord*; and which, having been well educated, he could not but know was so; *ver. 2*. *He wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord*, as it were on purpose to provoke him to anger, *ver. 6*. (2.) *He did after the abominations of the heathen*, *ver. 2*. and as did Ahab, *ver. 3*. not taking warning by the destruction both of the nations of Canaan and the house of Ahab for their idolatry; nay, *ver. 9*. *he did more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed*. When the holy seed degenerates, they are commonly worse than the worst of the profane.

More particularly, (1.) *He rebuilt the high places which his father had destroyed*, *ver. 3*. Thus did he trample upon the dust, and affront the memory of his worthy father, though he knew how much he was favoured of God, and honoured of men. It is likely he concurred with Rabshakeh's sentiments, *chap. xviii. 21*. that Hezekiah had done ill to destroy those high places, and pretended the honour of God and the edification and convenience of the people in rebuilding them. This he began with, but proceeded to that which was much worse: For, (2.) He set up other gods, Baal and Ashteroth, (which we translate a grove) and all the host of heaven, the sun and moon, the other planets, and the constellations; these he worshipped and served, *ver. 3*. gave their names to the images he made, and then did homage to them, and prayed for help from them. To these he built altars, *ver. 3*. and offered sacrifices, no doubt, on these altars. (3.) *He made his son pass through the fire*, by which he dedicated him a votary to Moloch, in contempt of the seal of circumcision by which he had

had been dedicated to God. (4.) He made the devil his oracle, and in contempt both of Urim and prophecy, he *used enchantment and dealt with familiar spirits*, ver. 6. like Saul. Conjurers and fortune-tellers, that pretended by the stars or the clouds, lucky and unlucky days, good and bad omens, the flight of birds, or the entrails of beasts, to foretel things to come, were great men with him, his intimates, his confidants; their arts pleased his fancy, and gained his belief, and his counsels were under their direction. (5.) We find afterwards, ver. 16. that he shed innocent blood very much in gratification of his own passion and revenge; some, perhaps, were secretly murdered, others taken off by colour of law. Probably much of the blood he shed was theirs that opposed idolatry, and witnessed against it, that would not bow the knee to Baal. The *blood of the prophets* useth to be in a particular manner charged upon Jerusalem, and it is likely he put to death many of them. The tradition of the Jews is, that he caused the prophet Isaiah to be sawn asunder; and many think the apostle refers to that, *Heb. xi. 37.* where he speaks of those that had so suffered.

Three things are here mentioned as aggravations of Manasseh's idolatry. (1.) That he set up his images and altars *in the house of the Lord*, ver. 4. in the two courts of the temple, ver. 5. in the very house of which God had said to Solomon, *Here will I put my name*, ver. 7. Thus he defied God to his face, and impudently affronted him with his rivals under his nose, as one that was neither afraid of God's wrath, nor ashamed of his own folly and wickedness. Thus he defecrated what had been consecrated to God, and did in effect turn God out of his own house, and put the rebels in possession of it. Thus when the faithful worshippers of God came to the place he had appointed to do their duty to him, to their great grief and terror they found other gods ready to receive their offerings. God had said here he would record his name, here he would put it for ever, and here it was accordingly preserved, while the idolatrous altars were kept at a distance; but Manasseh, by bringing them into God's house, did what he could to alter the property, and to make the name of the God of Israel to be no more in remembrance. (2.) That hereby he put a great slight upon the word of God, and his covenant with Israel. The favour he had shewed to that people, in putting his name among them; the kindness he intended them, never to *make them move out of that good land*, and the reasonableness of his expectations from them, *only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them*, ver. 7, 8. Upon these good terms did Israel stand with God, and had as fair a prospect of being happy as any people could have; *But they hearkened not*, ver. 9. They would not be kept close to God, neither by his precepts nor by his promises, both were cast behind their back. (3.) That hereby he seduced the people of God, debauched them, and drew them into idolatry, ver. 9. he made Judah to sin, ver. 11. as Jeroboam had *made Israel to sin*. His very example was enough to corrupt the generality of unthinking people, who would do as their king did, right or wrong. All that aimed at preferment would do as the court did; and others thought it safest to comply, for fear of making their king their enemy. Thus one way or other the holy city became a harlot, and Manasseh made her so. Those will have a great deal to answer for, that not only are wicked themselves, but help to make others so.

10. ¶ And the LORD spake by his servants the prophets, saying, 11. Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did which *were* before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols: 12. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing *such* evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle. 13. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab: and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down. 14. And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies, and they shall become a prey, and a spoil to all their enemies; 15. Because they have done *that which was* evil in my sight, and have provoked me to anger since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt even unto this day. 16. Moreover, Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD. 17. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and all that he did, and his sin that he sinned, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 18. And Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza: and Amon his son reigned in his stead.

Here is the doom of Judah and Jerusalem read, and it is a heavy doom. The prophets were sent in the first place to teach

them the knowledge of God, to mind them of their duty, and direct them in it: if they sped not in that, their next work was to reprove them for their sins, and to set them in view before them, that they might repent and reform, and return to their duty. If in this they prevailed not, but sinners went on forwardly, their next work was to foretel the judgments of God, that the terror of them might awaken those to repentance who would not be made sensible of the obligations of his love, or else that the execution of them in their season might be a demonstration of the divine mission of the prophets that foretold them. The prophets were deputed judges to those that would not hear and receive them as teachers. We have here,

(1.) A recital of the crime: the indictment is read upon which the judgment is grounded, ver. 11. Manasseh has done wickedly himself, though he knew better things, has even justified the Amorites, whose copy he wrote after, by outdoing them in impieties, and debauched the people of God, whom he has taught to sin, and forced to sin; and beside that (though that was bad enough) *he has filled Jerusalem with innocent blood*, ver. 16. has multiplied his murders in every corner of the city, and filled the measure of Jerusalem's blood-guiltiness (*Matth. xxiii. 32.*) up to the brim, and this against the crown and dignity of the King of kings, the peace of his kingdom, and the statutes in these cases made and provided.

(2.) A prediction of the judgment God would bring upon them for this. *They have done that which is evil*, and therefore *I am bringing evil upon them*, ver. 12. it will come, and it is not far off. The judgment should be, (1.) Very terrible and amazing, the very report of it should *make mens ears to tingle*, ver. 12. i. e. their hearts to tremble. It should make a great noise in the world, and occasion many speculations. (2.) It should be copied out (as the sins of Jerusalem had been) from Samaria, and the house of Ahab, ver. 13. when God lays righteousness to the line, it shall be the line of Samaria, measuring out to Jerusalem that which had been the lot of Samaria; when he lays judgment to the plummet, it shall be *the plummet of the house of Ahab*, marking out for the same ruin to which that wretched family was devoted. See *Isa. xxviii. 17.* Note, Those who resemble and imitate others in their sins, must expect to fare as they fared. (3.) That it should be an utter destruction; *I will wipe it as a man wipes a dish*. This intimates, 1. That every thing should be put into disorder, and their state subverted; they should be turned upside down, and all their foundations put out of course. 2. That the city should be emptied of its inhabitants, which had been the filth of it, as a dish is emptied when it is wiped: They shall all be carried captive, *the land shall enjoy her sabbaths*, and be laid by as a dish when it is wiped. See the comparison of the boiled pot, not much unlike this, *Ezek. xxiv. 1—4.* 2. That yet this should be in order to the purifying not the destroying of Jerusalem. The dish shall not be dropt, not broken to pieces, or melted down, but only wiped. This shall be the fruit, the taking away of the sinners first, and then of the sin. (4.) That therefore they should be destroyed, because they should be deserted, ver. 14. *I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance*. Justly are those that forsake God; forsaken of him; nor doth he ever leave any till they have first left him: but when God has forsaken a people, their defence is departed, and they become a prey, an easy prey to all their enemies. Sin is spoken of here as the alpha and the omega of their miseries. (1.) Old guilt came in remembrance as that which began to fill the measure, ver. 15. *They have provoked me to anger* from their conception and birth as a people, *since the day their fathers came out of Egypt*. This generation, treading in their fathers steps, are justly reckoned with for their fathers sins. (2.) The guilt of blood was it that filled the measure, ver. 16. Nothing has a louder cry, nor brings a forer vengeance than that.

This is all we have here of Manasseh; he stands convicted and condemned; but we hope in the book of Chronicles to hear of his repentance, and acceptance with God. Mean time we must be content in this place to have only one intimation of his repentance, (for so we are willing to take it) that he was buried, it is likely by his own order, *in the garden of his own house*, ver. 18. for being truly humbled for his sins, he judged himself *no more worthy to be called a son*, a son of David, and therefore not worthy to have even his dead body buried *in the sepulchres of his fathers*. True penitents take shame to themselves, not honour; yet having lost the credit of an innocent, the credit of a penitent was the next best he was capable of; and better it is and more honourable for a sinner to die repenting, and be buried in a garden; than to die impenitent, and be buried in the abbey.

19. ¶ Amon was twenty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem: and his mothers name was Meshullemeth, the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. 20. And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh did. 21. And he walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them: 22. And he forsook the LORD

God of his fathers, and walked not in the way of the LORD. 23. ¶ And the servants of Amon conspired against him, and slew the king in his own house. 24. And the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon, and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead. 25. Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, *are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?* 26. And he was buried in his sepulchre, in the garden of Uzza: and Josiah his son reigned in his stead.

Here is a short account of the short and inglorious reign of Amon, the son of Manasseh. Whether Manasseh in his blind and brutish zeal for his idols had sacrificed his other sons; or whether, having been educated to his idols, they were refused by the people, so it was that his successor was a son not born till he was forty five years old. And of him we are here told,

1. That his reign was very wicked. *He forsook the God of his fathers*, ver. 22. disobeyed the commands given to his fathers, and disclaimed the covenant made with his fathers, *and walked not in the way of the Lord, but in all the way which his father walked in*, ver. 20, 21. He trod in the steps of his father's idolatry, and revived that which he in the latter end of his days had put down. Note, Those who set bad examples, though they may repent themselves, yet cannot be sure that those whom they have drawn into sin by their example will repent; it is often otherwise.

2. That his end was very tragical. He having rebelled against God, his own servants conspired against him, and slew him; probably upon some personal disgust, when he had reigned but two years, ver. 23. His servants that should have guarded him, murdered him; his own house that should have been his castle of defence, was the place of his execution. He had profaned God's house with his idols, and now God suffered his own house to be polluted with his blood. How unrighteous soever they were that did it, God was righteous who suffered it to be done.

Two things the people of the land did by their representatives hereupon. 1. They did justice on the traitors that had slain the king, and put them to death; for though he was a bad king, he was their king, and it was a part of their allegiance to him to avenge his death. Thus they cleared themselves from having any hand in the crime, and did what was incumbent on them to deter others from the like villainous practices. 2. They did a kindness to themselves in making *Josiah his son king in his stead*, whom probably the conspirators had a design to put by: But the people stood by him, and settled him in the throne; encouraged it may be by the indications he gave, even in his early days, of a good disposition. Now they made a happy change from one of the worst to one of the best of all the kings of Judah. Once more, saith God, they shall be tried with a reformation; and if that succeed, well; if not, then after that I will cut them down. Amon was buried in the same garden where his father was, ver. 26. If his father put himself under that humiliation, the people will put him under it.

C H A P. XXII.

This chapter begins the story of the reign of good king Josiah, whose goodness shines the brighter, because it came just after so much wickedness, which he had the honour to reform; and just before so great a destruction, which yet he had not the honour to prevent. Here, after his general character, ver. 1, 2. we have a particular account of the respect he paid, (1.) To God's house, which he repaired, ver. 3—7. (2.) To God's book, which he was much assisted with the reading of, ver. 8—11. (3.) To God's messengers, whom he thereupon consulted, ver. 12—14. And by whom he received from God an answer, threatening Jerusalem's destruction, ver. 15—17. but promising favour to him, ver. 18—20. Upon which he set about that glorious work of reformation, which we have an account of in the next chapter.

1. **J**osiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adiahah of Bozath. 2. And he did *that which was right in the sight of the LORD*, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left. 3. ¶ And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, *that the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the LORD, saying,* 4. Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people. 5. And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD: and let them give it to the doers of the work

which is in the house of the LORD, to repair the breaches of the house, 6. Unto carpenters, and builders, and masons, and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house. 7. Howbeit, there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully. 8. ¶ And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD: and Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. 9. And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD. 10. And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book: and Shaphan read it before the king.

Concerning Josiah we are here told,

1. That he was very young when he began to reign, ver. 1. but eight years old. Solomon saith, *Wo unto thee, O land when thy king is a child*; but happy art thou, O land, when thy king is such a child. Our English Israel had once a king that was such a child, Edward VI. Josiah being young, had not received any bad impressions from the example of his father and grandfather, but soon saw their errors, and God gave him grace to take warning by them. See *Ezek. xviii. 14. &c.*

2. That he did *that which was right in the sight of the Lord*, ver. 1. See the sovereignty of divine grace; the father passed by, and left to perish in his sin; the son a chosen vessel. See the triumphs of that grace; Josiah, born of a wicked father, no good education, nor good example given him, but many about him who, no doubt, advised him to tread in his father's steps, and few that gave him any good counsel; and yet the grace of God makes him an eminent saint, *cuts him off from the wild olive, and grafts him into the good olive*, Rom. xi. 24. Nothing is too hard for that grace to do. He walked in a good way, and turned not aside (as some of his predecessors had done who began well) *to the right hand or to the left*: there are errors on both hands, but God kept him in the right way, he fell not either into superstition or profaneness.

3. That he took care for the repair of the temple. This he did in the eighteenth year of his reign, ver. 3. compare 2 *Chron. xxxiv. 8.* He began much sooner to *seek the Lord*, as appears, 2 *Chron. xxxiv. 3.* but it is to be feared the work of reformation went slowly on, and met with much opposition, so that he could not effect what he desired and designed till his power was thoroughly confirmed. It should quicken us when we come to years, to act with so much the more vigour in the service of God, to consider how much time we unavoidably lost in our minority. Having began late, we had need work hard; he sent Shaphan, the secretary of state to Hilkiah the high priest, to take an account of the money that was collected for this use by the door-keepers, ver. 4. for, it seems, they took much the same way of raising the money that Joash took, chap. xii. 9. When people gave by a little at a time the burthen was insensible, and giving by a voluntary contribution it was not complained of. — This money so collected he ordered him to lay out for the repair of the temple, ver. 5, 6. And now it seems the workmen, (as in the days of Joash) acquitted themselves so well that *there was no reckoning made with them*, ver. 7. which is certainly mentioned to the praise of the workmen, that they gained such a reputation for honesty, but whether to the praise of those that employed them I know not; a man should count money (we say) after his own father; it had not been amiss to have *reckoned with the workmen*, that others also might be satisfied of their honesty.

4. That in the repairing of the temple *the book of the law* was happily found and brought to the king, ver. 8, 10. Some think it was the autograph or original manuscript of the five books of Moses, under his own hand, others think it was only an ancient and authentick copy; most likely it was that which by the command of Moses was laid up in the most holy place, *Deut. xxxi. 24. &c.*

1. It seems this book of the law was lost and missing, either it was carelessly mislaid and neglected, thrown by into a corner, (as some throw their bibles) by those that knew not the value of it, and forgotten there, or it was maliciously concealed by some of the idolatrous kings, or their agents, who were restrained by the providences of God or their own consciences from burning and destroying it, but buried it, in hopes it would never see the light again, or, (as some think) it was carefully laid up by some of its friends, lest it should fall into the hands of its enemies; *whoever were the instruments of its preservation we ought to acknowledge the hand of God in it*; if this was the only authentick copy of the Pentateuch then in being, which had, (as I may say) so narrow a turn for its life, and was so near perishing, I wonder the hearts of all good people did not tremble for that sacred treasure, as Eli's for the ark, and am sure we now have

have reason to thank God upon our knees for that happy providence by which Hilkiah found this book at this time; found it when *he sought it not*, Isa. lxx. 1. If the holy scriptures had not been of God, they had not been in being at this day; God's care of the bible, is a plain indication of his interest in it.

2. Whether this was the only authentick copy in being or no; it seems, the things contained in it were new, both to the king himself, and to the high priest, for the king upon the reading of it rent his clothes; we have reason to think the command for the king's writing a copy of the law, and that for the publick reading of the law every seventh year, *Deut. xvii. 18. xxxi. 10, 11.* had neither of them been observed of a long time, and when the instituted means of keeping up religion are neglected, religion itself will soon go to decay; yet on the other hand, if the book of the law was lost, it is wondered what rule Josiah went by in doing that which was *right in the sight of the Lord*, and how the priests and people kept up the rights of their religion: truly, I am apt to think, that the people generally took up with abstracts of the law, like our abridgments of the statutes, which the priests, to save themselves the trouble of writing, and the people of reading the book at large, had furnished them with; a sort of ritual, directing them in the observances of their religion, but leaving out what they thought fit, and particularly, the promises and threatnings, *Lev. xxvi. and Deut. xxviii, &c.* for I observe, that those were the portions of the law which Josiah was so much affected with, *ver. 13.* for those were new to him; no summaries, extracts, or collections out of the bible, (though they may have their use) can be effectual to convey and preserve the knowledge of God, and his will, like the bible itself; it was no marvel that the people were so corrupt, when the book of the law was such a scarce thing among them; where that vision is not, the people perish; they that endeavoured to debauch them, no doubt, used all the arts they could to get that book out of their hands; the church of Rome could not keep up the use of images, but by forbidding the use of the scripture.

3. It was a great instance of God's favour, and a token for good to Josiah and his people, that the book of the law was thus seasonably brought to light, to direct and quicken that blessed reformation which Josiah had begun; it is a sign God has mercy in store for a people, when he magnifies his law among them, and makes that honourable, and furnisheth them with means for the increase of scripture-knowledge; the translating of the scriptures into vulgar tongues, was the glory, strength, and joy of the reformation from popery. — And, it is observable, they were about a good work, repairing the temple, when they found the book of the law; they that do their duty according to their knowledge, shall have their knowledge increased; to him that has, shall be given; the book of the law was an abundant recompence for all their care and cost about the repair of the temple.

4. Hilkiah, the priest, was exceedingly pleased with the discovery; O, saith he to Shaphan, Rejoice with me, for *I have found the book of the law*, *εὕρηκα εὕρηκα*, I have found, I have found that jewel of inestimable value; here, carry it to the king, it is the richest jewel of his crown, read it before him, he walks in *the way of David his father*, and if he be like him, he will love the book of the law, and bid that welcome, that will be his delight and his counsellor.

11. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes. 12. And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king, saying, 13. Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book *that is found*: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all *that which is written concerning us*. 14. So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum, the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college) and they communed with her. 15. ¶ And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, 16. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, *even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read*. 17. Because they have forsaken me, and have burnt incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands: therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched. 18. But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire

of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, *As touching the words which thou hast heard*; 19. Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thy self before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me: I also have heard *thee*, saith the LORD. 20. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace, and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

We hear no more of the repairing of the temple; no doubt, that good work went on well, but the book of the law that was found in it fills us now, and well it may, it is not laid up in the king's cabinet as a piece of antiquity, a rarity to be admired, but it is read before the king; those put the truest honour upon their bibles, that study them, and converse with them daily, feed on that bread, and walk by that light; men of honour and business must look upon an acquaintance with God's word to be their best business and honour.

Now here we have,

1. The impressions which the reading of the law made upon Josiah, he rent his clothes, as one ashamed of the sin of his people, and afraid of the wrath of God; he had long thought the case of his kingdom bad, by reason of the idolatries and impieties that had been found among them, but he never thought it so bad as he perceived it to be, by the book of the law now read to him; the rending of his clothes signified the rending of his heart for the dishonour done to God, and the ruin he saw coming upon his people.

2. The application he made to God hereupon, *Go, enquire of the Lord for me*, *ver. 13.* Enquire, (1.) What we shall do; what course we shall take to turn away God's wrath, and prevent the judgments which our sins have deserved; convictions of sin and wrath should put us upon this enquiry, *What shall we do to be saved? wherewithal shall we come before the Lord?* If ye will thus enquire, enquire quickly, before it be too late. (2.) What we may expect, and must provide for; he acknowledgeth *our fathers have not hearkened to the words of this book*; if this be the rule of right, certainly our fathers have been much in the wrong; now *the commandment came sin revived*, and appeared sin; in the glass of the law, he saw the sins of his people more numerous and more heinous than he had before seen them, and more exceeding sinful. — He infers from hence certainly, *great is the wrath that is kindled against us*; if this be the word of God, as no doubt it is, and he will be true to his word, as no doubt he will be, we are all undone; I never thought the threatnings of the law so severe, and the curses of the covenant so terrible as now I find them to be; it is time to look about us if these be in force against us. Note, Those who are truly apprehensive of the weight of God's wrath, cannot but be very solicitous to obtain his favour, and inquisitive how they may make their peace with him; magistrates should enquire for their people, and study how to prevent the judgments of God that they see hanging over them.

This enquiry Josiah sent, 1. By some of his great men who are named, *ver. 12.* and again, *ver. 14.* Thus he put an honour upon the oracle, by employing those of the first rank to attend it. 2. To Huldah the prophetess, *ver. 14.* The Spirit of prophecy, that inestimable treasure, was sometimes put not only into earthen vessels, but into the weaker vessels, *that the excellency of the power might be of God*. Miriam had helped to lead Israel out of Egypt, *Mic. vi. 4.* Deborah judged them, and now Huldah instructed them in the mind of God, and her being a wife was no prejudice at all to her being a prophetess, *marriage is honourable in all*: It was a mercy to Jerusalem, that when bibles were scarce, they had prophets, as that afterwards when prophecy ceased, they had more plenty of bibles, for God never leaves himself without witness, because he will leave sinners without excuse. — Jeremiah and Zephaniah prophesied at this time, yet the king's messengers made Huldah their oracle, probably, because her husband having a place at court, for he was keeper of the wardrobe, they had had more and longer acquaintance with her, and greater assurances of her commission than of any other, they had, it is likely, consulted her upon other occasions, and had found the word of God in her mouth was truth; she was near, for she dwelt at Jerusalem, in a place called Mithneh, the second rank of buildings from the royal palace; the Jews say, she prophesied among the women, the court ladies, being herself one of them, who, it is probable, had their apartments in that place; happy the court that had a prophetess within the verge of it, and knew how to value her.

3. The answer he received from God to his enquiry; Huldah returned it not in the language of a courtier, Pray give my humble service to his Majesty, and let him know that this is the message I have for him from the God of Israel, but in the dialect of

a prophets speaking from him before whom all stand upon the same level, *tell the man that sent you to me*, ver. 15. even kings, though gods to us, are men to God, and shall so be dealt with, *for with him there is no respect of persons*.

(1.) She lets him know what judgments God had in store for Judah and Jerusalem, ver. 16, 17. *My wrath shall be kindled against this place*, and what is hell itself, but the fire of God's wrath kindled against sinners? Observe the degree and duration of it, it is so kindled that *it shall not be quenched*; the decree is gone forth, it is too late now to think of preventing it, the iniquity of Jerusalem shall not be purged with sacrifice or offering. Hell is unquenchable fire: and the reference it has, 1. To their sins, which they have committed, as it were, with design and on purpose to provoke me to anger, it is a fire of their own kindling, they would provoke me, and I am provoked at length. 2. To God's threatenings; the evil I bring is just, according to the words of the book which the king of Judah has read, the scripture is fulfilled in it, they that would not be bound by the precept shall be bound by the penalty; God will be found no less terrible to impenitent sinners, than his word makes him to be.

(2.) She lets him know what mercy God has in store for him. 1. Notice is taken of his great tenderness and concern for the glory of God, and the welfare of his kingdom, ver. 19. *Thine heart was tender*. Note, Those that distinguish themselves, God will distinguish them; the generality of the people were hardened, and their hearts unhumbed, so were the wicked kings his predecessors; but Josiah's heart was tender, he received the impressions of God's word, trembled at it, and yielded to it; he was exceedingly grieved for the dishonour done to God by the sins of his fathers, and of his people, he was afraid of the judgments of God which he saw coming upon Jerusalem, and earnestly deprecated; this is tenderness of heart, and thus he *humiliated himself before the Lord*, and expressed these pious affections by rending his clothes, and weeping before God, probably, in his closet, but he that sees in secret faith it was before him, and he heard it, and put every tear of tenderness into his bottle. Note, Those that most fear God's wrath, are least likely to feel it; it should seem, those words *Lev. xxvi. 32*. much affected Josiah, *I will bring the land into desolation*, for when he heard of *the desolation and the curse*, i.e. that God would forsake them, and *separate them to evil*, (for till it came to that they were neither desolate nor accursed) then he rent his clothes, that went to his heart. 2. A reprieve is granted till after his death, ver. 20. *I will gather thee to thy fathers*. The saints then, no doubt, had a comfortable prospect of happiness on the other side death, else being gathered to their fathers would not have been so often made the matter of a promise as we find it was; Josiah could not prevail to prevent the judgment itself, but God promised him he should not live to see it, which, (especially considering that he died in the midst of his days, before he was forty years old) would have been but a small reward for his eminent piety, if there were not another world in which he should be abundantly recompensed, *Heb. xi. 16*. — When the righteous is taken away from the evil to come, he enters into peace, *Isa. lviii. 1, 2*. This is promised to Josiah here, *Thou shalt go to thy grave in peace*, which refers not to the manner of his death, for he was killed in a battle, but to the time of it, it was a little before the captivity in Babylon, that great trouble, in comparison with which the rest were as nothing, so that he might be truly said to die in peace, that did not live to share in that; he died in the love and favour of God, which secure such a peace as no circumstances of dying, no, not dying in the field of war, could alter the nature of, or break in upon.

C H A P. XXIII.

We have here, (1.) The happy continuance of the goodness of Josiah's reign, and the progress of the reformation he begun, reading the law, ver. 1, 2. renewing the covenant, ver. 3. cleansing the temple, ver. 4. and rooting out idols and idolatry, with all the relics thereof, in all places as far as his power reached, ver. 5—20. keeping a solemn passover, ver. 21—23. and clearing the country of witches, ver. 24. and in all this acting with extraordinary vigour, ver. 25. (2.) The unhappy conclusion of it in his untimely death, as a token of the continuance of God's wrath against Jerusalem, ver. 26—30. (3.) The more unhappy consequences of his death, in the bad reigns of his two sons Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim that came after him, ver. 31—37.

1. **A**ND the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah, and of Jerusalem. 2. And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. 3. ¶ And

the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant, that were written in this book: and all the people stood to the covenant.

Josiah had received a message from God that there was no preventing the ruin of Jerusalem, but he only should deliver his own soul, yet he doth not therefore sit down in despair, and resolve to do nothing for his country, because he cannot do all he would, no, he will do his duty, and then leave the event to God; a publick reformation is the thing resolved on, if any thing prevent the threatened ruin it must be that, and here we have the preparations for that reformation.

1. He summoned a general assembly of the states, the elders, the magistrates or representatives of Judah and Jerusalem, to meet him in the house of the Lord, with the priests and prophets, the ordinary and extraordinary ministers, that they all joining in it, it might become a national act, and so, the more likely to prevent national judgments; they were all called to attend, ver. 1, 2. that the business might be done with the more solemnity, that they might all advise and assist in it, and that those who were against it might be discouraged from making any opposition; parliaments are no diminution at all to the honour and power of good princes, but a great support to it.

2. Instead of making a speech to this convention, he ordered the book of the law to be read to them, nay, it should seem he read it himself, ver. 2. as one much affected with it, and desirous that they should be so too; Josiah thinks it not below him to be a reader, no more than Solomon did to be a preacher, nay, and David himself to be a door-keeper in the house of God: Besides the convention of the great men, he had a congregation of the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to hear the law read; it is really the interest of princes to promote the knowledge of the scriptures in their dominions. — If the people be but as steadfastly resolved to obey by law, as he is to govern by law the kingdom will be happy; all people are concerned to know the scripture, and all in authority to spread the knowledge of it.

3. Instead of proposing laws for the confirming of them in their duty, he proposed an association, by which they should all jointly engage themselves to God, ver. 3. The book of the law was the book of the covenant, that if they would be to God a people, he would be to them a God; they here engage themselves to do their part, not doubting but then God would do his. (1.) The covenant was, that they should walk after the Lord, in compliance with his will, in his ordinances and providences, should answer all his calls, and attend all his motions; that they should make conscience of all his commandments, moral, ceremonial and judicial, and should carefully observe them with all their heart and all their soul, with all possible care and caution, sincerity, vigour, courage, and resolution, and so fulfil the conditions of this covenant, in dependence upon the promises of it. (2.) The covenanters were, the king himself in the first place, who stood by his pillar, chap. xi. 14. and publicly declared his consent to this covenant, to set them an example, and to assure them not only of his protection, but of his presidency, and all the furtherance his power could give them in their obedience; it is no abridgment of the liberty even of princes themselves to be in bonds to God: All the people likewise stood to the covenant, i.e. they signified their consent to it, and promised to abide by it; it is of good use with all possible solemnity to oblige ourselves to our duty, and it is especially seasonable after notorious backslidings to sin, and decay in that which is good; he that bears an honest mind doth not startle at assurances; fast bind, fast find.

4. And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD, all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burnt them without Jerusalem, in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Beth-el. 5. And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places, in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem, them also that burnt incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven. 6. And he brought out the grove from the house of the LORD, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burnt it at the brook Kidron, and stamp't it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people. 7. And he brake down the houses of the sodomites that were by the house of the LORD, where the women wove hang-

hangings for the grove. 8. And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burnt incense, from Geba to Beer-sheba, and brake down the high places of the gates that *were* in the entering in of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which *were* on a mans left hand at the gate of city. 9. Nevertheless, the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren. 10. And he defiled Topheth, which *is* in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech. 11. And he took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the LORD, by the chambers of Nathan-melech the chamberlain, which *was* in the suburbs, and burnt the chariots of the sun with fire. 12. And the altars that *were* on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, did the king beat down, and brake *them* down from thence, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron. 13. And the high places that *were* before Jerusalem, which *were* on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile. 14. And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men. 15. ¶ Moreover, the altar that *was* at Beth-el, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burnt the high place, and stamp it small to powder, and burnt the grove. 16. And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that *were* there in the mount, and sent and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burnt *them* upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words. 17. Then he said, What title *is* that that I see? And the men of the city told him, *It is* the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Beth-el. 18. And he said, Let him alone, let no man move his bones: so they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria. 19. And all the houses also of the high places that *were* in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the LORD to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Beth-el. 20. And he slew all the priests of the high places that *were* there, upon the altars, and burnt mens bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem. 21. ¶ And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the LORD your God, as *it is* written in the book of this covenant. 22. Surely there was not holden such a passover, from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah: 23. But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, *wherein* this passover was holden to the LORD in Jerusalem. 24. ¶ Moreover, the *workers* with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah, and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law, which *were* written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD.

We have here an account of such a reformation as we have not met with in all the history of the kings of Judah, such thorough riddance made of all the abominable things, and such foundations laid of a glorious good work; and here I cannot but wonder at two things, (1.) That so many wicked things should be got in, and kept standing so long, as we find here removed. (2.) That notwithstanding the removal of these wicked things, and the hopeful prospects here given of a happy settlement, yet within a few years Jerusalem was utterly destroyed, and even this did not save it, for the generality of the

people after all hated to be reformed. — *The founder melteth in vain, and therefore, reprobate silver shall men call them,* Jer. vi. 29, 30.

Let us here observe,

1. What abundance of wickedness there was and had been in Judah and Jerusalem, one would not have believed it possible that in Judah, where God was known; in Israel, where his name was great; in Salem, in Sion, where his dwelling place was, such abominations should be found as here we have an account of; Josiah had now reigned eighteen years, and had himself set the people a good example, and kept up religion according to law, and yet, when he came to make inquisition for idolatry, it is incredible the depth and extent of the dunghil he had to carry away.

(1.) Even in the house of the Lord, that sacred temple which Solomon built, and dedicated to the honour and for the worship of the God of Israel, there were found vessels, all manner of utensils for the worship of Baal, and of the grove (or Ashtarothe) and of all the host of heaven, ver. 4. Though Josiah had suppressed the worship of idols, yet the provisions made for that worship were all carefully preserved, even in the temple it self, to be used again whenever the present restraint should be taken off; nay, even the grove it self, the image of it, was yet standing in the temple, ver. 6. some make it the image of Venus, the same with Ashtarothe.

(2.) Just at the entering in of the house of the Lord was a stable for horses kept, (would you think it?) for a religious use, they were holy horses, given to the sun, ver. 11. as if he needed them, who rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race, Psal. xix. 5. or rather, they would thus represent to themselves the swiftness of his motion, which they much admired, making their religion to conform to the poetical fictions of the chariot of the sun, the follies of which, even a little philosophy, without any divinity, would have exposed and made them ashamed of. — Some say, those horses were to be led forth in pomp every morning to meet the rising sun, others, that the worshippers of the sun rode out upon them to adore the rising sun; it should seem they drew the chariots of the sun, which the people worshipped; strange, that ever men that had the written word of God among them, should be thus vain in their imaginations!

(3.) Hard by the house of the Lord there were houses of the sodomites, where all manner of lewdness and filthiness, even that which was most unnatural, was practised, and under pretence of religion, in honour of their impure deities; corporal and spiritual whoredom went together, and the vile affections which they were given up to, were the punishment of their vain imaginations; they that dishonour their God, were justly left thus to dishonour themselves, Rom. i. 24, &c. There were women that wove hangings for the grove, ver. 7. tents which encompassed the image of Venus, where the worshippers committed all manner of lewdness, and this in the house of the Lord; they did ill that made our Father's house a house of merchandise, they did worse that made it a den of thieves, but those did worst of all that made it (*Horrendum dictu!*) a perfect bawdy-house, in an impudent defiance of the holiness of God and his temple; well might the apostle call them abominable idolatries.

(4.) There were many idolatrous altars found, ver. 12. some in the palace, on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, the roofs of their houses being flat, they made them their high places, and set up altars upon them, Jer. xix. 13. Zeph. i. 5. domestick altars; the kings of Judah did so: and though Josiah never used them, yet to this time they remained there; Manasseh had built altars for his idols in the house of the Lord, when he repented he removed them, and cast them out of the city, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 15. but not destroyed them; his son Amon, it seems, had brought them again into the courts of the temple, there Josiah found them, and thence he broke them down, ver. 12.

(5.) There was Tophet, in the valley of the son of Hinnom, very near Jerusalem, where the image of Molech (that God of unnatural cruelty, as others were of unnatural uncleanness) was kept, to which some sacrificed their children, burning them in the fire, others dedicated them, making them to pass through the fire, ver. 10. labouring in the very fire, Hab. ii. 13. It is supposed to have been called Tophet from *toph*, a drum, because they beat drums at the burning of the children, that their shrieks might not be heard.

(6.) There were high places before Jerusalem, which Solomon had built, ver. 13. The altars and images on those high places, we may suppose, had been taken away by some of the preceding godly kings, or, perhaps, Solomon himself had removed them when he became a penitent, but the buildings, or some parts of them remained, with other high places, till Josiah's time. — They that introduce corruptions into religion, know not how far they will reach, nor how long they will last, antiquity is no certain proof of verity; there were also high places all the kingdom over, from Geba to Beer-sheba, ver. 8. and high places of the gates, in the entering in of the gate of the governor; in those high places (bishop Patrick thinks) they burnt incense to those tutelar gods, to whom their idolatrous kings had committed the protection of their city; and, probably, the

governor of the city had a private altar for his Penates, his household gods.

(7.) There were idolatrous priests, that officiated at all those idolatrous altars, *ver.* 5. Chemarim, black men, or that wore black, see *Zeph.* i. 5. they that sacrificed to Osiris, or that wept for Tammuz, *Ezek.* viii. 14. or that worshipped the infernal deities, put on black garments as mourners. — Those idolatrous priests, the kings of *Judah* had ordained to burn incense in the high places; it should seem, they were priests of the house of Aaron, who thus profaned their dignity, and there were others also who had no right at all to the priesthood that burnt incense to Baal.

(8.) There were conjurers and wizards, and such as dealt with familiar spirits, *ver.* 24. When they worshipped the devil as their god, no marvel, they consulted him as their oracle.

2. What a full destruction good Josiah made of all those relics of idolatry, such is his zeal for the Lord of hosts, and his holy indignation against all that is displeasing to him, that nothing shall stand before him; the law was, that the monuments of the Canaanites idolatry must be all destroyed, *Deut.* vii. 5. much more of the idolatry of the Israelites, in whom it was much more impious, profane, and perfidious.

1. He orders Hilkiah and the other priests to clear the temple, that was their province, *ver.* 4. away with all the vessels that were made for Baal, they must never be employed in the service of God, no, nor reserved for any common use, they must all be burnt, and the ashes of them carried to Bethel, that place had been the common source of idolatry, for there was set up one of the calves, and that lying next to Judah, from thence the infection had spread into that kingdom, and therefore now he makes it the layfall of idolatry, the dunghil to which he carries the filth and off-scouring of all things, that if possible, it might be made loathsome to these that had been fond of it.

2. The idolatrous priests were all put down, those of them that were not of the house of Aaron, or had sacrificed to Baal, or other false gods, he put to death, according to the law, *ver.* 20. he *slew them upon their own altars*, the most acceptable sacrifice that ever had been offered upon them, a sacrifice to the justice of God; those that were descendants from Aaron, and yet had burnt incense in the high places, but to the true God only, he forbade them ever to approach the altar of the Lord, they had forfeited that honour, *ver.* 9. he *brought them out of the cities of Judah*, *ver.* 8. that they might not do mischief in the country by secretly keeping up their old idolatrous usages; but he allowed them to *eat of the unleavened bread*, (the bread of the meat-offering, *Lev.* ii. 4, 5.) *among their brethren*, with whom they were to reside, that being under their eye they might be kept from doing hurt, and taught to do well; that bread, that unleavened bread (heavy and unpleasant as it was) was better than they deserved, and that would serve to keep them alive; but whether they were permitted to eat of all the sacrifices, as blemished priests were, *Lev.* xxi. 22. which is called in general the bread of their God, may be justly questioned.

3. All the images were broken to pieces and burnt, the image of the grove, *ver.* 6. some goddess or other, was reduced to ashes, and the *ashes cast upon the graves of the common people*, *ver.* 6. the common burying-place of this city; by the law, a ceremonial uncleanness was contracted by the touch of a grave, so that in casting them here he declared them most impure, and none could touch them but they must make themselves unclean by it; he cast it into the graves, so the Chaldee, intimating that he would have all idolatry buried, out of his sight, as a loathsome thing, and forgotten, as dead men are out of mind, *ver.* 14. he *filled the places of the graves with the bones of men*; as he carried the ashes of the images to the graves, to mingle them with dead mens bones, so he carried dead mens bones to the places where the images had been, and put them in the room of them, that both ways idolatry might be rendered loathsome, and the people kept both from the dust of the images, and from the ruins of the places where they had been worshipped; dead men and dead gods were much alike, and fittest to go together.

4. All the naughty houses were suppressed, those nests of impiety that harboured idolaters, the houses of the sodomites, *ver.* 7. down with them, down with them, rase them with the foundations; the high places were in like manner broken down, and levelled with the ground, *ver.* 8. even that which belonged to the governor of the city, for no man's greatness or power may protect him in idolatry or profaneness; let governors be obliged in the first place to reform, and then the governed will be the sooner influenced; he defiled the high places, *ver.* 8. and again, *ver.* 13. did all he could to render them abominable, and put the people out of conceit with them, as Jehu did when he made the house of Baal a draught house, or jakes, *2 Kings* x. 27. — Tophet, (which, contrary to other places of idolatry, was in a valley, whereas they were on hills or high places) was likewise defiled, *ver.* 10. was made the burying place of the city; concerning this we have a whole sermon, *Jer.* xix. 1, 2, &c. where it is said,

they shall bury in Tophet, and the whole city is threatned to be made like Tophet.

5. The horses that had been given to the sun were taken away, and put to common use, and so were delivered from the vanity to which they were made subject; and the chariots of the sun (what pity was it that those horses and chariots should be kept as the chariots and horsemen of Israel) he burnt with fire; and if the sun be a flame, they never resembled him so as they did when they were chariots of fire.

6. The workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards were put away, *ver.* 24. Those of them that were convicted of witchcraft, it is likely, he put to death, and so deterred others from those diabolical practices; in all this, he had a sincere regard to the words of the law which were written in the book lately found, *ver.* 24. he made that his rule, and kept that in his eye throughout his reformation.

3. How his zeal extended itself to the cities of Israel that were within his reach; the ten tribes were carried captive, the Assyrian colonies did not fully people the country, so that it is likely, many cities had put themselves under the protection of the kings of Judah, *2 Chron.* xxx. 1. xxxiv. 6. whom he here visits to carry on his reformation there; as far as our influence goes, our endeavours should go to do good, and bring the wickedness of the wicked to an end.

(1.) He defiled and demolished Jeroboam's altar at Bethel, with the high place, and the grove that belonged to it, *ver.* 15, 16. the golden calf, it should seem, was gone, (*Thy calf, O Samaria, has cast thee off*) but the altar was there, which those that were wedded to their old idolatries made use of still; this was, 1. Defiled, *ver.* 16. — Josiah, in his pious zeal, was ransacking the old seats of idolatry, and spied the sepulchres in the mount, in which, probably, the idolatrous priests were buried, not far from the altar at which they had officiated, and which they were so fond of, that they were desirous to lay their bones by it, these he opened, took out the bones and *burnt them upon the altar*, to shew that thus he would have done by the priests themselves if they had been alive, as he did by those whom he found alive, *ver.* 20. thus he polluted the altar, defecrated it, and made it odious; it is threatned against idolaters, *Jer.* viii. 1, 2. that *their bones should be spread before the sun*; that there threatned, and this here executed, which speaks their *iniquity to be upon their bones*, *Ezek.* xxxii. 27. is an intimation of a punishment after death, reserved for those that live and die impenitent, in that or any other sin; the burning of the bones, if that were all, is a small matter, but if it signify the torment of the soul in a worse flame, *Luke* xvi. 24. it is very dreadful. — This, as it was Josiah's act, seems to be the result of a very sudden resolve, he had not done it, but that he happened to turn himself and spy the sepulchres, and yet it was foretold above three hundred and fifty years before, when this altar was first built by Jeroboam, *1 Kings* xiii. 2. God always foresees, and has sometimes foretold as certain, that which yet to us seems most contingent; *the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord*; king Josiah's was so, and he turned it (or ever he himself was aware, *Cant.* vi. 12.) to do this; no word of God shall fall to the ground. — 2. It was demolished, he broke down the altar and all its appurtenances, *ver.* 15. burnt what was combustible, and since an idol is nothing in the world, he went as far towards the annihilating of it as possibly he could, for he *stamped it small to powder*, and made it *as dust before the wind*.

(2.) He destroyed all the houses of the high places, all those synagogues of Satan that were in the cities of Samaria, *ver.* 19. these the kings of Israel built, and God raised up this king of Judah to pull them down, for the honour of the ancient house of David, from which the ten tribes had revolted; the priests he justly made sacrifices upon their own altars, *ver.* 20.

(3.) He carefully preserved the sepulchre of that man of God which came from Judah to foretel this, which now a king which came from Judah executed; this was that good prophet who *proclaimed these things against the altar of Bethel*, and yet was himself slain by a lion for disobeying the word of the Lord; but to shew that God's displeasure against him went no further than his death, but ended there, God so ordered it, that when all the graves about his were disturbed, his was safe, *ver.* 17, 18. and no man moved his bones, he was entered into peace, and therefore shall rest in his bed, *Isa.* lvii. 2. The old lying prophet, who desired to be buried as near him as might be, it should seem knew what he did, for his dust also being mingled with that of the good prophet, was preserved for his sake, see *Numb.* xxiii. 10.

Lastly, We are here told what a solemn passover Josiah and his people kept after all this; when they had cleared the country of the old leaven, then they applied themselves to the keeping of the feast; when Jehu had destroyed the worship of Baal, yet he took no heed to walk in the commandments and ordinances of God, but Josiah considered that we must learn to do well, and not only cease to do evil; and that the way to keep out all abominable customs, is to keep all instituted ordinances, see *Lev.* xviii. 30. and therefore he commanded all the people to keep

keep the passover, which was not only a memorial of their deliverance out of Egypt, but a token of their dedication to him that brought them out, and their communion with him: this he found written in the *book of the law*, here called *the book of the covenant*; for though the divine authority may deal with us in a way of absolute command, divine grace condescends to federal transactions, and therefore he observed it. — We have not such a particular account of this passover as of that in Hezekiah's time, 2 *Chron.* xxx. but in general that *there was not holden such a passover* in any of the foregoing reigns, no not *from the days of the judges*, ver. 22. which, by the way, intimates, that though the account which the book of Judges gives of the state of Israel under that dynasty looks but melancholy, yet there were then some golden days. — This passover, it seems, was extraordinary, for the number and devotion of the communicants, their sacrifices and offerings, and their exact observance of the laws of the feast; and it was not now as in Hezekiah's passover, when many communicated that were not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary, and the Levites were permitted to do the priests work. — We have reason to think that during all the remainder of Josiah's reign religion flourished, and the feasts of the Lord were very carefully observed, but in his passover the satisfaction they took in the covenant lately renewed, the reformation in pursuance of it, and the revival of an ordinance which they had lately found the divine original of in the book of the law, and which had long been neglected or slubbered over, put them into mighty transports of holy joy; and God was pleased to recompence their zeal in destroying idolatry with uncommon tokens of his presence and favour, all this concurred to make it such a passover as there had not been the like.

25. And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.

26. ¶ Notwithstanding, the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. 27. And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem, which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there. 28. Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 29. ¶ In his days Pharaoh-nechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him, and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him. 30. And his servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulchre: and the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his fathers stead.

Upon the reading of these verses we must say, Lord, though *thy righteousness* be as the great mountains, evident and conspicuous, and past dispute, yet *thy judgments* are a great deep, unfathomable, and past finding out, *Psal.* xxxvi. 6. What shall we say to this?

1. It is here owned that Josiah was one of the best kings that ever sat upon the throne of David, ver. 25. As Hezekiah was a nonsuch for faith and dependence upon God in straits, 2 *Kings* xviii. 5. so Josiah was a nonsuch for sincerity and zeal in carrying on a work of reformation. For this there was none like him. (1.) That he *turned to the Lord* from whom his fathers had revolted. It is true religion to turn to God as one we have chosen and love: He did what he could to turn his kingdom also to the Lord. (2.) That he did this *with his heart and soul*; his affections and aims were right in what he did. Those make nothing of their religion, that do not make heart-work of it. (3.) That he did it with *all his heart*, and *all his soul*, and *all his might*; with vigour, and courage, and resolution: he could not otherwise have broke through the difficulties he had to grapple with. What great things may we bring to pass in the service of God, if we be but lively and hearty in it? (4.) That he did this *according to all the law of Moses*; in an exact observance of that law, and with an actual regard to it. His zeal did not transport him into any irregularities, but in all he did he walked by rule.

2. Notwithstanding this, he was cut off by a violent death, in the midst of his days, and his kingdom was ruined within a few years after. Consequent upon such a reformation as this, one would have expected nothing but the prosperity and glory both of king and kingdom; but, quite contrary, we find both under a cloud.

1. Even the reformed kingdom continues marked for ruin. For all this, ver. 26. *The Lord turned not from the fierceness of*

his great wrath. That is certainly true which God spake by the prophet, *Jer.* xviii. 7, 8. That if a nation doomed to destruction *turn from the evil* of sin, God will *repent of the evil* of punishment; and therefore we must conclude that Josiah's people, though they submitted to Josiah's power, yet did not heartily imbibe Josiah's principles. However, they were turned by force, they did not voluntarily *turn from their evil way*, but still continued their affection for their idols; and therefore he that knows mens hearts would not recal the sentence, which was, that Judah should be removed, as Israel had been, and Jerusalem it self cast off, ver. 37. Yet even this destruction was intended to be their effectual reformation; so that we must say not only that the criminals had filled their measure, and were ripe for ruin, but rather that the disease was come to a crisis, and was ready for a cure; and this shall be all the fruit, even the taking away of sin.

2. As an evidence of this, even the reforming king is cut off in the midst of his usefulness, in mercy to him, that he might not see the evil which was coming upon his kingdom; but in wrath to his people, for his death was an inlet to their desolations. — The king of Egypt waged war, it seems, with the king of Assyria, (so the king of Babylon is now called) Josiah's kingdom lay between them; he therefore thought himself concerned to oppose the king of Egypt, and check the growing threatening greatness of his power; for though at this time he protested he had no design against Josiah, yet if he should prevail to unite the river of Egypt and the river Euphrates, the land of Judah would soon be overflowed between them; therefore *Josiah went against him*, and was killed in the first engagement, ver. 29, 30. — Here, (1.) We cannot justify Josiah's conduct; he had no clear call to engage in this war, nor do we find that he asked counsel of God by Urim or prophets concerning it. What had he to do to appear and act as a friend and ally to the king of Assyria? *Should he help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?* If the kings of Egypt and Assyria quarrelled, he had reason to think God would bring good out of it to him and his people, and make them instrumental to weaken one another. Some do so understand the promise made to him, that he should *come to his grave in peace*, so as in the event it was not performed, because by his miscarriage in this matter he forfeited the benefit of it. God has promised to keep us *in all our ways*; but if we go out of our way, we throw our selves out of his protection. I understand the promise so, as that I believe it was fulfilled, for he *died in peace* with God and his own conscience, and saw not, nor had any immediate prospect of the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans; yet I understand the providence to be a rebuke to him for his rashness. (2.) We must adore God's righteousness in taking away such a jewel from an unthankful people that knew not how to value it. They greatly lamented his death, 2 *Chron.* xxxv. 25. urged to it by Jeremiah, who told them the meaning of it, and what an ill omen it was; but they had not made a due improvement of the mercies they enjoyed by his life, which God taught them the worth of by the want of it.

31. ¶ Jehoahaz was twenty and three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem: and his mothers name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 32. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done. 33. And Pharaoh-nechoh put him in bands at Riblah, in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem, and put the land to a tribute of an hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold. 34. And Pharaoh-nechoh made Eliakim the son of Josiah king, in the room of Josiah his father, and turned his name to Jehoiakim, and took Jehoahaz away: and he came to Egypt, and died there. 35. And Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh, but he taxed the land to give the money according to the commandment of Pharaoh; he exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of every one according to his taxation, to give it unto Pharaoh-nechoh. 36. ¶ Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem: and his mothers name was Zebudah, the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. 37. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.

Jerusalem saw not a good day after Josiah was laid in his grave, but one trouble came after another, till within twenty two years it was quite destroyed. Of the reign of two of his sons here is a short account; the former we find here a prisoner, and the latter a tributary to the king of Egypt, and both so in the very beginning of their reign. This king of Egypt having slain Josiah, though he had not had any design upon Judah, yet being provoked by the opposition which Josiah gave him, now it should seem he bent all his force against his family and kingdom. If Josiah's

Josiah's sons had trod in his steps, they should have fared the better for his piety; but deviating from them, they fared the worse for his rashness.

(1.) Jehoahaz, a younger son, was first made king by the people of the land; probably because he was observed to be of a more active warlike genius than his elder brother, and likely to make head against the king of Egypt, and to avenge his father's death, which perhaps the people were more solicitous about in point of honour, than the keeping up and carrying on of his father's reformation; and the issue was accordingly.

1. He did ill, *ver.* 32. Though he had a good education, and a good example given him, and many a good prayer we may suppose put up for him, yet he *did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord*, and it is to be feared began to do so in his father's life-time, for his reign was so short that he could not in that much shew himself. He did according to all that his wicked fathers had done. Though he had not time to do much, yet he had chosen his patterns, and shewed whom he intended to follow, and whose steps he resolved to tread in; and having done this; he is here reckoned to have done according to all the evil which they did whom he proposed to imitate. It is of great consequence to young people whom they choose to take example by, and whom they emulate: an error in this choice is fatal, *Phil.* iii. 17, 18.

2. Doing ill, no wonder that he fared ill. He was but three months a prince, and was then made a prisoner, and lived and died so. The king of Egypt seized him, and put him in bands, *ver.* 33. fearing lest he should give him disturbance, carried him to Egypt, and there he died soon after, *ver.* 34. This Jehoahaz is that young lion whom Ezekiel speaks of in his lamentation for the princes of Israel, that learned to catch the prey, and devour men, (that was the evil he did in the sight of the Lord) but the nations heard of him, he was taken in their pit, and they brought him with chains into the land of Egypt, *Ezek.* xix. 1—4. See *Jer.* xxii. 10, 11, 12.

(2.) Eliakim, another son of Josiah, was made king by the king of Egypt; it is not said in the room of Jehoahaz, his reign was so short that it was scarce worth taking notice of, but in the room of Josiah. The crown of Judah had hitherto always descended from a father to a son, and never till now from one brother to another; once the succession had so happened in the house of Ahab, but never till now in the house of David.—The king of Egypt having used his power in making him king, farther shewed it in changing his name, he called him Jehoiakim, a name that has reference to Jehovah, for he had no design to make him renounce or forget the religion of his country; all people will walk in the name of their God, and let him do so. The king of Babylon did not do so by those whose names he changed, *Dan.* i. 7.

Of this Jehoiakim we are here told, 1. That the king of Egypt made him poor, exacted from him a vast tribute of a hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold, *ver.* 23. which with much ado he squeezed out of his subjects, and gave it to Pharaoh, *ver.* 35. Formerly the Israelites had spoiled the Egyptians, now the Egyptians spoil Israel: see what woful changes sin makes. 2. That which made him poor, yet did not make him good; notwithstanding the rebukes of providence he was under, by which he should have been convinced, humbled, and reformed, he *did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord*, *ver.* 37. and so prepared against himself greater judgments; for such God will send, if lesser do not do the work for which they are sent.

C H A P. XXIV.

Things are here ripening for, and basing towards, the utter destruction of Jerusalem. We left Jehoiakim on the throne, placed there by the king of Egypt: now here we have, 1. The troubles of his reign, how he was brought into subjection by the king of Babylon, and severely chastised for attempting to shake off the yoke, *ver.* 1—5. and how Egypt also was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, *ver.* 7. 2. The desolations of his son's reign, which continued but three months; and then he and all his great men being forced to surrender at discretion, were carried captives to Babylon, *ver.* 8—16. 3. The preparatives of the next reign, which was the last of all, for the utter ruin of Jerusalem, which the next chapter will give us an account of, *ver.* 17—20.

1. **I**N his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him. 2. And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets. 3. Surely at the commandment of the LORD came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did. 4. And also for the innocent blood that he shed (for he filled Je-

rusalem with innocent blood) which the LORD would not pardon. 5. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 6. So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead. 7. And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the king of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt unto the river of Euphrates, all that pertained to the king of Egypt.

We have here the first mention of a name which makes a great figure both in the histories, and in the prophecies of the Old Testament; it is that of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, *ver.* 1. That head of gold. A potent prince, and one that was the terror of the mighty in the land of the living, and yet his name had not been known in sacred writ, if it had not been employed in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the captivity of the Jews.

1. He made Jehoiakim his tributary, and kept him in subjection three years, *ver.* 1. Nebuchadnezzar began his reign in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, in his eighth year he made him his prisoner, but restored him upon his promise of faithfulness to him; that promise he kept about three years, but then rebelled, probably, in hopes of assistance from the king of Egypt. If Jehoiakim had served his God as he should have done, he had not been servant to the king of Babylon; but God would thus make him know the difference between his service and the service of the kings of the countries, 2 Chron. xii. 8. If he had been content with his servitude, and true to his word, his condition had been no worse; but rebelling against the king of Babylon, he plunged himself into more trouble.

2. When he rebelled he sent his forces against him to destroy his country, bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, Ammonites, who were all now in the service and pay of the king of Babylon, *ver.* 2. and withal retained and now shewed their ancient enmity to the Israel of God. Yet no mention is here made of their commission from the king of Babylon, but only of that from the King of kings. The Lord sent against him all these bands. And again, *ver.* 3. Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, else the commandment of Nebuchadnezzar could not have brought it. Many are serving God's purposes that are not aware of it.

Two things God intended in suffering Judah to be thus harassed. 1. The punishment of the sins of Manasseh, which God now visited upon the third and fourth generation. So long he waited before he visited them, to see if the nation would repent; but they continued impenitent, notwithstanding Josiah's endeavours to reform them, and ready to relapse upon the first turn into their former idolatries; now the old bond was put in suit, they were called up upon the former judgment, that was revived which God had laid up in store, and sealed among his treasures, *Deut.* xxxii. 34. *Job* xiv. 17. and in remembrance of that he removed Judah out of his sight, and let the world know, that time will not wear out the guilt of sin, and that reprieves are not pardons. All that Manasseh did was called to mind, but especially the innocent blood that he shed, much of it we may suppose was the blood of God's witnesses and worshippers, which the Lord would not pardon.—Is there then any unpardonable sin but the blasphemy against the holy Ghost? This is meant of the remitting of the temporal punishment: though Manasseh repented, and we have reason to think even the persecutions and murders he was guilty of were pardoned, so that he was delivered from the wrath to come, yet as they were national sins, they lay still charged upon the land, crying for national judgments. Perhaps, some were now living that were aiding and abetting; and the present king was guilty of innocent blood, as appears *Jer.* xxii. 17. See what a provoking sin murder is, how loud it cries, and how long. See what need nations have to lament the sins of their fathers, lest they smart for them. 2. God intended hereby the accomplishment of the prophecies; it was according to the word of the Lord which he spake by his servants the prophets. Rather shall Judah be removed out of his sight, nay rather shall heaven and earth pass away, than any word of God fall to the ground. Threatnings will be fulfilled as sure as promises, if the sinner's repentance prevent not.

3. The king of Egypt was likewise subdued by the king of Babylon, and a great part of his country taken from him, *ver.* 7. It was but lately that he had oppressed Israel, *chap.* xxiii. 33. now he is himself brought down, and disabled to attempt any thing for the recovery of his losses, or the assistance of his allies; he dares not come any more out of his land. Afterwards he attempted to give Zedekiah some relief, but was obliged to retire, *Jer.* xxxvii. 7.

4. Jehoiakim seeing his country laid waste, and himself ready to fall into the enemies hand, as it should seem, broke his heart, and died for grief in the midst of his days, *ver.* 6. So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers, but it is not said he was buried with them, for, no doubt, the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled, that he should not be lamented, as his father was, but buried with

with the burial of an ass, Jer. xxii. 18, 19. and his dead body cast out, Jer. xxxvi. 30.

8. ¶ Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months : and his mothers name was Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. 9. And he did *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done. 10. ¶ At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. 11. And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege it. 12. And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers : and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign. 13. And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the kings house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said. 14. And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, *even* ten thousand captains, and all the craftsmen, and smiths : none remained, save the poorest sort of the land. 15. And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the kings mother, and the kings wives, and his officers, and the mighty men of the land, *those* he carried into captivity, from Jerusalem to Babylon. 16. And all the men of might, *even* seven thousand, and craftsmen, and smiths a thousand, *all that were strong and apt for war*, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon. 17. ¶ And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his fathers brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah. 18. Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem : and his mothers name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 19. And he *that which was evil* in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. 20. For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

This should have been the history of king Jehoiachin's reign, but alas, it is only the history of king Jehoiachin's captivity, as it is called, *Ezek. i. 2.* He came to the crown not to have the honour of wearing it, but the shame of losing it ; *Ideo tantum venerat ut exiret.*

1. His reign was short and inconsiderable ; he reigned but three months, and then was removed and carried captive to Babylon, as his father, it is likely, would have been, if he had lived but so much longer. What an unhappy young prince was this, that was thrust into a falling house, a sinking throne ! What an unnatural father had he, who begat him to suffer for him ; and by his own sin and folly had left himself nothing to bequeath to his son but his own miseries ! — Yet this young prince reigned long enough to shew that he justly smarted for his fathers sins, for he trod in their steps, *ver. 9.* He *did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord*, as they had done ; he did nothing to cut off the entail of the curse, to discharge the encumbrances of his crown, and therefore *transit cum onere*, with his own iniquity, that of his fathers shall come into the account.

2. The calamities that came upon him, and his family and people, in the very beginning of his reign, were very grievous.

(1.) Jerusalem was besieged by the king of Babylon, *ver. 10, 11.* He had sent his forces to ravage the country, *ver. 2.* now he came himself and laid siege to the city. Now the word of God was fulfilled, *Deut. xxviii. 49, &c.* *The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, of fierce countenance, that shall first eat the fruit of thy land, and then besiege thee in all thy gates.*

(2.) Jehoiachin immediately surrendered at discretion. As soon as he heard the king of Babylon was come in person against the city, his name being by this time become very formidable, he beat a parley, and went out to him, *ver. 12.* Had he made his peace with God, and taken the method that Hezekiah did in the like case, he needed not to have feared the king of Babylon, but might have held out with courage, honour, and success ; one should have chased a thousand ; but wanting the faith and piety of an Israelite, he had not the resolution of a man, of a soldier, of a prince. He and his royal family, his mother, and wives, his servants, and princes, delivered themselves up prisoners of war ; and this came of their being servants of sin.

(3.) Nebuchadnezzar rifled the treasures both of the church and of the state, and carried away the silver and gold of both, *ver. 13.* Now the word of God by Isaiah was fulfilled, *chap. xx. 17.* *All that is in thine house shall be carried to Babylon.* Even the vessels of the temple which Solomon had made, and laid up in store to be used as the old ones were worn out, he cut off from the temple, and began to cut them in pieces, but upon second thoughts reserved them for his own use, for we find Belshazzar drinking wine in them, *Dan. v. 2, 3.*

(4.) He carried away a great part of Jerusalem into captivity to weaken it, that he might effectually secure to himself the dominion of it, and prevent its revolt ; and to enrich himself with the wealth or service of those he took away : there had been some carried away eight years before this, in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar and the third of Jehoiakim, among them were Daniel and his fellows. See *Dan. i. 1, 2.* They had approved themselves so well that this politic prince coveted more of them. Now he carried off, 1. The young king himself, and his family, *ver. 15.* and we find, *chap. xxv. 28, 29.* that for thirty seven years he continued a close prisoner. 2. All the great men, the princes, and officers, whose riches were *kept for the owners thereof to their hurt*, *Eccles. v. 13.* tempting the enemies to make a prey of them first. 3. All the military men, the *mighty men of valour*, *ver. 14.* *The mighty of the land*, *ver. 15.* *The men of might, even all that were strong, and apt for war*, *ver. 16.* These could not defend themselves, and the conqueror would not leave them to defend their country, but took them away to be employed in his service. 4. All the craftsmen and smiths who made weapons of war ; in taking them, he did in effect disarm the city according to the Philistines policy, *1 Sam. xiii. 19.* In this captivity Ezekiel the prophet was carried away, *Ezek. i. 1, 2.* and Mordecai, *Esth. ii. 6.* — This Jehoiachin was also called Jeconiah, *1 Chron. iii. 16.* and in contempt Coniah, *Jer. xxii. 24.* where his captivity is foretold.

3. The successor whom the king of Babylon appointed in the room of Jehoiachin. God had written him childless, *Jer. xxii. 30.* and therefore his uncle was intrusted with the government. The king of Babylon made Mattaniah king, the son of Josiah, and to mind him, and let all the world know that he was his creature, he changed his name, and called him Zedekiah, *ver. 17.* God had sometimes charged it upon his people, *They have set up kings but not by me*, *Hos. viii. 4.* and now to punish them for that, the king of Babylon shall have the setting up of their kings. Those are justly deprived of their liberty, that use it and insist upon it against God's authority. — This Zedekiah was the last of the kings of Judah : the name which the king of Babylon gave him, signifies, *The justice of the Lord*, which was a presage of the glorifying of God's justice in his ruin.

1. See how impious this Zedekiah was. Though the judgments of God upon his three immediate predecessors might have been a warning to him not to tread in their steps, yet *he did that which was evil*, like all the rest, *ver. 14.*

2. See how impolitic he was. As his predecessor lost his courage, so he his conduct, with his religion, for he *rebelled against the king of Babylon*, *ver. 20.* whose tributary he was, and so provoked him whom he was utterly unable to contend with, and who, if he had continued true to him, would have protected him ; which was the most foolish thing he could do, and hastened the ruin of his kingdom. This came to pass *through the anger of the Lord, that he might cast them out from his presence.* Note, When those that are intrusted with the counsels of a nation act unwisely, and against their true interest, we ought to take notice of the displeasure of God in it. It is for the sins of a people that God removes the speech of the trusty, and takes away the understanding of the aged, and hides from their eyes the things that belong to the publick peace. Whom God will destroy, he infatuates.

C H A P. XXV.

Ever since David's time, Jerusalem had been a famous place ; beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth ; while the book of psalms lasts, that name will sound great. In the New Testament we read much of it, when it was, as here, ripening again for its ruin. In the close of the bible we read of a new Jerusalem ; every thing therefore that concerns Jerusalem is worthy our regard. In this chapter we have, (1.) The utter destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans ; the city besieged and taken, *ver. 1—4.* the houses burnt, *ver. 8, 9.* the wall broken down, *ver. 10.* and the inhabitants carried away into captivity, *ver. 11, 12.* The glory of Jerusalem was, 1. That it was the royal city, there were set the thrones of the house of David ; but that glory is here departed, for the prince is made a most miserable prisoner, and the seed royal destroyed, *ver. 5—7.* and the principal officers put to death, *ver. 18—21.* 2. That it was the holy city, there was the testimony of Israel ; but that glory is departed, for Solomon's temple is burnt to the ground, *ver. 9.* and the sacred vessels that remained are carried away to Babylon, *ver. 13—17.* Thus is Jerusalem become as

a widow, Lam. i. 1. *Icabod, Where is the glory?* (2.) *The distraction and dispersion of the remnant that was left in Judah under Gedaliab, ver. 22—26.* (3.) *The countenance which after thirty seven years imprisonment was given to Jehoiachin the captived king of Judah, ver. 27—30.*

1. **A**ND it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it, and they built forts against it round about. 2. And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. 3. And on the ninth day of the fourth month, the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. 4. ¶ And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night, by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the kings garden, (now the Chaldees were against the city round about) and the king went toward the plain. 5. And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him. 6. So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon, to Riblah, and they gave judgment upon him. 7. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

We left king Zedekiah in rebellion against the king of Babylon, chap. xxiv. 20. contriving and endeavouring to shake off his yoke, when he was no way able to do it, nor took the right method, by making God his friend first. Now here we have an account of the fatal consequences of that attempt.

1. The king of Babylon's army laid siege to Jerusalem, ver. 1. what should hinder them when the country was already in their possession, chap. xxiv. 2. They built forts against the city round about, from whence, by such arts of war as they then had, they battered it; sent into it instruments of death, and kept out of it the necessary supports of life. Formerly Jerusalem had been compassed with the favour of God, as with a shield, but now their defence was departed from them, and their enemies surrounded them on every side. Those that by sin have provoked God to leave them, will find that innumerable evils will compass them about. — Two years this siege lasted, at first the army retired for fear of the king of Egypt, Jer. xxxvii. 11. but finding him not so powerful as they thought, they soon returned, with a resolution not to quit the city till they had made themselves masters of it.

2. During this siege the famine prevailed, ver. 3. so that for a long time they eat their bread by weight, and with care, Ezek. iv. 16. Thus they were punished for their gluttony and excess, their fulness of bread, and feeding themselves without fear; at length there was no bread for the people of the land, i. e. the common people, the soldiers, whereby they were weakened, and rendered unfit for service, now they eat their own children for want of food; see this foretold by one prophet, Ezek. v. 10. and bewailed by another, Lam. iv. 3, &c. Jeremiah earnestly persuaded the king to surrender, Jer. xxxviii. 17. but his heart was hardened to his destruction.

3. At length the city was taken by storm, it was broken up, ver. 4. the besiegers made a breach in the wall, at which they forced their way into it, the besieged, unable any longer to defend it, endeavoured to quit it, and make the best of their way; many, no doubt, were put to the sword, the victorious army being much exasperated by their obstinacy.

4. The king and his family and all his great men made their escape in the night, by some secret passages which the besiegers either had not discovered or did not keep their eye upon, ver. 4. but those as much deceive themselves who think to out-run God's judgments as those who think to out-face them, the feet of him that flees from them will as surely fail as the hands of him that fights against them; when God judgeth he will overcome. — Intelligence was given to the Chaldeans of the king's flight, and which way he was gone, so that they soon overtook him, ver. 5. his guards were scattered from him, every man shifting for his own safety; had he put himself under God's protection, that would not have failed him now: he presently fell into the enemies hands, and here we are told what they did with him.

(1.) He was brought to the king of Babylon, and tried by a council of war, for rebelling against him who set him up; and to whom he had sworn fidelity; God and man had a quarrel with him for this, see Ezek. xvii. 16, &c. The king of Babylon now lay at Riblah, which lay between Judea and Babylon, that he might be ready to give orders both to his court at home and his army abroad.

(2.) His sons were slain before his eyes, though children, that this doleful spectacle, the last his eyes were to behold, might

leave a remaining impression of grief and horror upon his spirit as long as he lived; in slaying his sons they shewed their indignation at his falshood, and in effect declared, that neither he nor any of his breed were fit to be trusted, and therefore not fit to live.

(3.) His eyes were put out, by which he was deprived of that common comfort of human life which is given even to them that are in misery, and to the bitter in soul, the light of the sun; by which he was also disabled for any service: he dreaded being mocked, and therefore would not be persuaded to yield, Jer. xxxviii. 19. but that which he feared came upon him with a witness, and, no doubt, added much to his misery; for as they that are deaf are jealous every body talks of them, so they that are blind are jealous every body laughs at them; by this two prophecies that seemed to contradict one another were both fulfilled. Jeremiah prophesied that Zedekiah should be brought to Babylon, Jer. xxxii. 5. — xxxiv. 3. Ezekiel prophesied that he should not see Babylon, Ezek. xii. 13. he was brought thither but his eyes being put out he did not see it; thus he ended his days before he ended his life.

(4.) He was bound in fetters of brass, and so carried to Babylon, he that was blind needed not be bound, his blindness fettered him, but for his greater disgrace they led him bound, only where-as common malefactors are laid in iron, Psal. cv. 18. — cvii. 10. he being a prince was bound with fetters of brass; but that the metal was somewhat nobler and lighter was little comfort, while still he was in fetters; let it not seem strange if those that have been held in the cords of iniquity come to be thus held in the cords of affliction, Job xxxvi. 8.

8. ¶ And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month (which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon) came Nebuzar-adan captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: 9. And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the kings house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great mans house burnt he with fire. 10. And all the army of the Chaldees that were with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about. 11. Now the rest of the people that were left in the city, and the fugitives that fell away to the king of Babylon, with the remnant of the multitude, did Nebuzar-adan, the captain of the guard carry away. 12. But the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land, to be vine-dressers, and husbandmen. 13. And the pillars of brass that were in the house of the LORD, and the bases, and the brasen sea that was in the house of the LORD, did the Chaldees break in pieces, and carried the brass of them to Babylon. 14. And the pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered, took they away. 15. And the fire-pans, and the bowls, and such things as were of gold, in gold, and of silver, in silver, the captain of the guard took away. 16. The two pillars, one sea, and the bases which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD, the brass of all these vessels was without weight. 17. The height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits, and the chapter upon it was brass: and the height of the chapter three cubits: and the wreathen-work, and pomegranates upon the chapter round about all of brass: and like unto these had the second pillar with wreathen-work. 18. ¶ And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the door. 19. And out of the city he took an officer, that was set over the men of war, and five men of them that were in the kings presence, which were found in the city, and the principal scribe of the host, which mustered the people of the land, and threescore men of the people of the land that were found in the city. 20. And Nebuzar-adan captain of the guard took these, and brought them to the king of Babylon, to Riblah. 21. And the king of Babylon smote them, and slew them at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was carried away out of their land.

Though we have reason to think the army of the Chaldeans much enraged against the city for holding out with so much stubbornness, yet they did not therefore put all to fire and sword as soon as they had taken the city, which is too commonly done in that case, but about a month after, (compare ver. 8. with ver. 3.) Nebuzar-adan was sent with orders to compleat the destruction of Jerusalem; this space God gave them to repent after all the foregoing days of his patience, but in vain, their hearts (for

ought appears) were still hardened, and therefore execution is awarded to the utmost.

1. The city and temple are burnt, *ver. 9.* It doth not appear that the king of Babylon designed to send any colonies to people Jerusalem, and therefore he ordered it to be laid in ashes, as a nest of rebels; at the burning of the king's house and the houses of the great men one cannot so much wonder, the inhabitants had by their sins made them combustible, but that the house of the Lord should perish in these flames, that that holy and beautiful house should be burnt with fire, *Isa. lxiv. 11.* is very strange, that house which David prepared for; and which Solomon built at such a vast expence; that house which had the eye and heart of God perpetually upon it, *1 Kings ix. 3.* might not that have been snatched as a brand out of this burning? No, that will not be fire-proof against God's judgments; this stately structure must into ashes, and it is probable the ark in it, for the enemies having heard how dear the Philistines paid for the abusing of it durst not seize that, nor did any of its friends take care to preserve it, for then we should have heard of it again in the second temple; one of the apocryphal writers doth indeed tell us that the prophet Jeremiah got it out of the temple and conveyed it to a cave in mount Nebo, on the other side Jordan, and hid it there, *2 Macc. ii. 4, 5.* but that could not be, for Jeremiah was a close prisoner at that time. By the burning of the temple God would shew how little he cares for the external pomp of his worship when the life and power of religion is neglected; the people trusted to the temple, as if that would protect them in their sins, *Jer. vii. 4.* but God by this lets them know, that when they had profaned it, they would find it but a refuge of lies. About four hundred and twenty years (some say four hundred and thirty years) this temple had stood, the people having forfeited the promises made concerning it, those promises must be understood of the gospel-temple, which is God's rest for ever. — It is observable that the second temple was burnt by the Romans the same month and the same day of the month that the first temple was burnt by the Chaldeans, which Josephus saith was the tenth of August.

2. The walls of Jerusalem are demolished, *ver. 10.* as if the victorious army would be revenged on them that had kept them out so long, or at least prevent the like opposition another time; sin unwalls a people, and takes away their defence: these walls were never repaired till Nehemiah did it.

3. The residue of the people are carried away captive to Babylon, *ver. 11.* Most of the inhabitants had perished by sword or famine, or had made their escape when the king did, (for it is said, *ver. 5. his army was scattered from him*) so that there were very few left, who, with the deserters, making in all but eight hundred thirty two persons, (as appears, *Jer. lii. 29.*) were carried away into captivity; only the poor of the land were left behind, *ver. 12.* to till the ground, and dress the vineyards for the Chaldeans. Sometimes poverty is a protection, and one has reason to say, Fare fall nothing; for they that have nothing, have nothing to lose: When the rich Jews, who had been oppressive to the poor, were made strangers, nay, prisoners in an enemy's country, the poor, whom they had despised and oppressed, had liberty and peace in their own country; thus providence sometimes remarkably humbles the proud, and favours them of low degree.

4. The brazen vessels and other appurtenances of the temple are carried away, those of silver and gold being most of them gone before; those two famous columns of brass, Jachin and Boaz, which signified the strength and stability of the house of God, were broken to pieces, and the brass of them carried to Babylon, *ver. 13.* When the things signified were sinned away, what should the signs stand there for? Ahaz had profanely cut off the borders of the bases, and put the brazen sea upon a pavement of stones, *2 Kings xvi. 17.* justly therefore are the bases themselves and the brazen sea delivered into the enemies hand; it is just with God to take away his ordinances from those that profane and abuse them, that curtail and depress them; some things remained of gold and silver, *ver. 15.* which were now carried off; but most of this plunder was brass, such a vast quantity of it, that it is said to be *without weight*, *ver. 16.* The carrying away of the vessels wherewith they ministered, *ver. 14.* put an end to the ministration; it was a righteous thing with God to deprive those of the benefit of his worship that had slighted it so long, and preferred false worships before it; they that would have many altars, now shall have none.

5. Several of the great men are slain in cold blood; Seraiah the chief priest, who was the father of Ezra (as appears, *Ezra vii. 1.*) the second priest, that when there was occasion officiated for him, and three door-keepers of the temple, *ver. 18.* the general of the army, five privy-counsellors, (afterwards they made them up seven, *Jer. lii. 26.*) the secretary of war, or pay-master of the army, and threescore country gentlemen that had concealed themselves in the city; these being persons of some rank, were brought to the king of Babylon, *ver. 19, 20.* who ordered them to be all put to death, *ver. 21.* when in reason they might have hoped that surely the bitterness of death was past; these the king of Babylon's regency looked upon as most active in op-

posing him; but divine justice, we may suppose, looked upon them as ringleaders in that idolatry and impiety which were punished by these desolations. — This completed the calamity, *so Judah was carried away out of their land*, about eight hundred and sixty years after they were put in possession of it by Joshua: now the scripture was fulfilled, *The Lord shall bring thee and the king which thou shalt set over thee into a nation which thou hast not known*, *Deut. xxviii. 36.* Sin kept their fathers forty years out of Canaan, and now turned them out: the Lord is known by those judgments which he executeth, and makes good that word which he hath spoken, *Amos iii. 2. You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.*

22. ¶ And as for the people that remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, ruler. 23. And when all the captains of the armies, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, there came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan the son of Careah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of a Maachathite, they, and their men. 24. And Gedaliah sware to them, and to their men, and said unto them, Fear not to be the servants of the Chaldees: dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you. 25. But it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Eliashamah, of the seed royal, came, and ten men with him, and smote Gedaliah, that he died, and the Jews and the Chaldees that were with him at Mizpah. 26. And all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the armies arose, and came to Egypt: for they were afraid of the Chaldees. 27. ¶ And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, that Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, did lift up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison. 28. And he spake kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon, 29. And changed his prison-garments: and he did eat bread continually before him all the days of his life. 30. And his allowance was a continual allowance given him of the king, a daily rate for every day, all the days of his life.

In these verses we have,

1. The dispersion of the remaining people, the city of Jerusalem was quite laid waste; some people there were in the land of Judah, *ver. 22.* that had rid out the storm, and (which was no small favour at this time, *Jer. xlv. 5.*) had their lives given them for a prey. Now see,

(1.) What a good posture they were put into; the king of Babylon appointed Gedaliah, one of themselves, to be their governor and protector under him, a very good man, and one that would make the best of bad, *ver. 22.* his father Ahikam was one that countenanced and protected Jeremiah when the princes had vowed his death, *Jer. xxvi. 24.* It was probable this Gedaliah, by the advice of Jeremiah, had gone over to the Chaldeans, and had approved himself so well, that the king of Babylon entrusted him with the government; he resided not at Jerusalem, but at Mizpah, in the land of Benjamin, a place famous in Samuel's time, thither those came that had fled from Zedekiah, *ver. 5.* and put themselves under his protection, *ver. 23.* which he assured them of, if they would be patient and peaceable under the government of the king of Babylon, *ver. 24.* Gedaliah, though he had not the pomp and power of a sovereign prince, yet might have been a greater blessing to them than many of their kings had been, especially having such a privy-counsel as Jeremiah, who was now with them, and interested himself in their affairs, *Jer. xl. 5, 6.*

(2.) What a fatal breach was made upon them presently by the death of Gedaliah, within two months after he entered upon his government. — The utter extirpation of the Jews for the present was determined, and therefore it is in vain for them to think of taking root again, the whole land must be plucked up, *Jer. xlv. 4.* yet this hopeful settlement is dashed to pieces, not by the Chaldeans, but by some of themselves: the things of their peace were so hid from their eyes, that they knew not when they were well, nor would believe when they were told.

1. They had a good governor of their own, and him they slew for spite to the Chaldeans, because he was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar, *ver. 25.* Ishmael, who was of the royal family, envying

envying Gedaliah's advancement, and the happy settlement of the people under him, though he could not propose to set up himself, resolved to ruin him, and basely slew him and all his friends, both Jews and Chaldees; Nebuchadnezzar would not, could not have been a more mischievous enemy to their peace, than this degenerate branch of the house of David was.

2. They were as yet in their own good land, but they out-run it, and went to Egypt for fear of the Chaldees, *ver.* 26. The Chaldeans had reason enough to be offended at the murder of Gedaliah; but if those that remained had humbly remonstrated to them that it was only the act of Ishmael and his party, we may suppose they who were innocent of it, nay, who suffered greatly by it, should not have been punished for it: but under pretence of this apprehension, contrary to the counsel of Jeremiah, they all went to Egypt, where, it is probable, they mixed with the Egyptians by degrees, and were never heard of more as Israelites; thus was there a full end made of them by their own folly and disobedience, and Egypt had the last of them, that the last verse of that chapter of threatnings might be fulfilled after all the rest, *Deut.* xxviii. 68. *The Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again.* These events are more largely related by the prophet Jeremiah, chap. xl. to chap. xlv. — *Quæque ipsæ miserrime eviit, & quænam pars magna fuit.*

2. The reviving of the captive prince; of Zedekiah we hear no more after he was carried blind to Babylon; it is likely, he did not live long, but when he died he was buried with some marks of honour, *Jer.* xxxiv. 5. Of Jehoiachin, or Jeconiah, who surrendered himself, chap. xxiv. 12. we are here told, that as soon as Evil-merodach came to the crown, upon the death of his father Nebuchadnezzar, he released him out of prison, where he had lain thirty seven years, and was now fifty five years old, *chap. xxv. 1.* *He treated him kindly to him, paid more respect to him than to any other of the kings his father left in captivity, ver. 28.* gave him princely clothing instead of his prison garments, maintained him in his own palace, *ver. 29.* and allowed him a pension for himself and his family some way agreeable to his rank, *a daily rate for every day as long as he lived.* Consider this.

1. As a very happy change of Jehoiachin's condition; to have honour and liberty after he had been so long in confinement and disgrace, the plenty and pleasure of a court, after he had been so

long accustomed to the straits and miseries of a prison, was like the return of the morning after a very dark and tedious night: Let none say they shall never see good again, because they have long seen little but evil; the most miserable know not what blessed turn providence may yet give to their affairs, nor what comforts they are reserved for *according to the days wherein they have been afflicted*, *Psal.* xc. 15. However, the death of afflicted saints, is to them such a change as this here was to Jehoiachin, it will release them out of their prison, shake off the body, that prison-garment, and open the way to their advancement; will send them to the throne, to the table of the King of kings, the glorious liberty of God's children.

2. As a very generous act of Evil-merodach's; he thought his father made the yoke of his captives too heavy, and therefore with the tenderness of a man and the honour of a prince made it lighter; it should seem all the kings he had in his power were favoured, but Jehoiachin above them all; some think for the sake of the antiquity of his family, and the honour of his renowned ancestors, David and Solomon; none of the kings of the nations, it is likely, were descended from so long a race of kings in a direct lineal succession, and by a male line, as the king of Judah. — The Jews say this Evilmerodach had been himself imprisoned by his own father, when he returned from his madness for some mismanagement at that time, and that in prison he contracted a friendship with Jehoiachin, therefore as soon as he had it in his power shewed him this kindness as a sufferer, as a fellow-sufferer; some suggest that Evilmerodach had learned from Daniel and his fellows the principles of the true religion, and was well affected to them, and upon that account favoured Jehoiachin.

3. As a good providence of God, for the encouragement of the Jews in captivity, and the support of their faith and hope concerning their enlargement in due time; this happened just about the midnight of their captivity, thirty six of the seventy years were now past, and almost as many were yet behind, and now to see their king thus advanced would be a comfortable earnest to them of their own release in due time, in the set time: *and the spirit thus arising light in the darkness.* to encourage them to hope even in the *darkest and darkest day*, that at *morning time it shall be light*; when therefore we are perplexed let us not be in despair.



The End of the First Volume.

